

# CHRISTIANS IN. SOCIETY

BY  
EDWIN BARKER  
AND  
RONALD PRESTON

LONDON  
STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT PRESS  
58 BLOOMSBURY STREET, W.C.1

*First published September 1939*

*Distributed in Canada by our exclusive agents,  
The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd.,  
70 Bond Street, Toronto*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
NORTHUMBERLAND PRESS LIMITED, GATESHEAD ON TYNE

## PREFACE

THE experience which lies behind this book can be traced to three main sources: first, the industrial work of the Student Christian Movement on which both of us have been until recently engaged, second, the preparatory work for, and the proceedings at, Section 3 of the Oxford Œcumenical Conference in July 1937, and third, the work of Professor Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary, New York. It is addressed primarily to Christians, though we hope that it may help to make the fundamental Christian position clear to some of those in working-class organizations who are fiercely critical of Christianity, and especially of the ineptitude of the Christian Church. But because most of our readers will be Christians, we have had to content ourselves with stating the Christian position and arguing from it, rather than defending it, as a complete apologetic would require.

Nevertheless, the argument may be found difficult, even by Christians, for two reasons. On the one hand our approach is, as yet, rather unfamiliar

in this country. We have stated it positively throughout, and only referred, in Chapter III, to other approaches to the subject for the purpose of illustration and contrast; space would not allow a fuller treatment of them. On the other hand, we echo the feelings of Lord Stamp, who, in the preface to his recent book *Christianity and Economics*, says, "I do not believe a really elementary book, requiring no concentration by the general reader, can be written which will deal at all adequately with the subject matter, and break up his initial prejudgements." Many of the points raised in Chapter I, however, are dealt with more fully later, sometimes in a slightly different context.

Since the book covers a wide field, many problems have been referred to briefly as illustrations, and none have been treated exhaustively. We feel that to give references for them all would overweight the book, and so these are only given for direct quotations. A very short bibliography of key books will be found at the end.

A note should perhaps be added about the use of the word "Church". This may either refer to the whole company of Christian believers in every denomination, or to the different denominations; in the latter case, again, it may refer to the constituted authority of a denomination, or to the



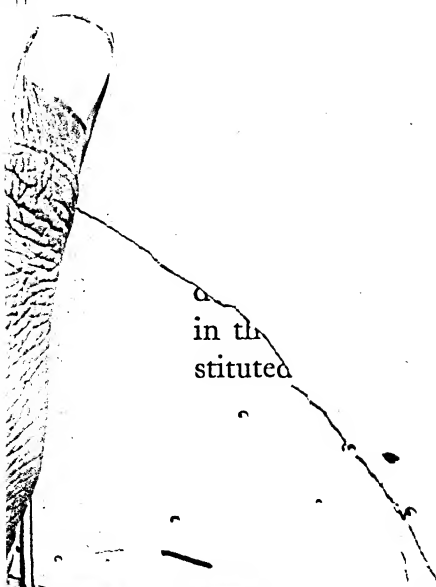
clergy, ministers, or laity. Further shades of meaning could be demarcated, but we have found it impracticable to restrict the use of the word to any one sense. Where it is not clear from the context, a more precise definition of the sense in question has been given.

We are much indebted to many friends with whom the theme of the book has been discussed, but especially to Mr. W. G. Symons, of Stoke-on-Trent, Mr. David Paton, of Birmingham, Mr. Eric Brewin, of Ripon Hall, Oxford, and the Rev. Hugh Martin, the Editor of the S.C.M. Press, who have made many suggestions for improving the manuscript. We are particularly grateful to Mrs. Edwin Barker, who has given us continual help and encouragement at every stage of our work from its inception.

E.B.

R.H.P.

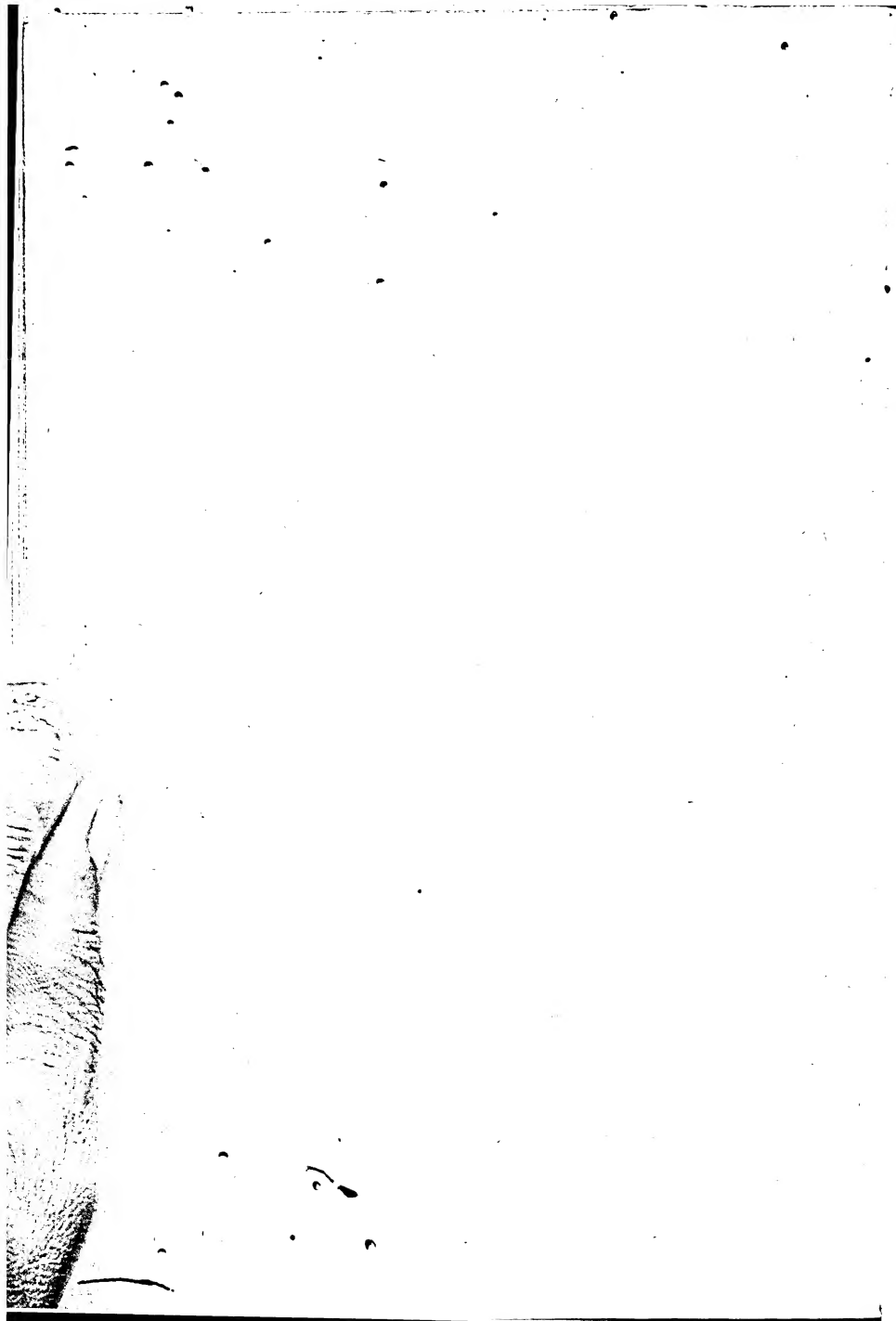
*April 1939.*



in the  
stituted

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	5
INTRODUCTION: THE 1930's . . . . .	11
CHAPTER	
I. THE GOSPEL AND CONDUCT . . . . .	25
II. THE NECESSITY OF POLITICS . . . . .	50
III. WHY CHRISTIANS DIFFER . . . . .	81
IV. THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIANITY . . . . .	118
V. STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH AND THE CHRISTIAN . . . . .	144
VI. CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY . . . . .	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	187
INDEX . . . . .	189



## INTRODUCTION

### THE 1930's

It was intended to begin writing this book in September 1938. In the gathering crisis of that month, however, it was impossible to sit down to any continuous, creative thinking, much less engage on a piece of co-operative writing. Moreover it seemed at one moment that events would lead to such an upheaval, with wartime activity dominating the whole life of the country, that any book on the theme of Christians in society would be irrelevant. What the conditions would have been afterwards no one could foresee, though it was impossible to take other than a gloomy view. So writing was abandoned for the time being.

Now we have a respite, after a series of events which are likely to be the cause of acute controversy for a long time. It may, indeed, be no more than a respite. Two more countries have recently disappeared from the map of Europe; it is hazardous to guess what may happen in the next few months. It is increasingly clear that the events of last autumn were the results of forces at work in the earlier years of this decade, forces

whose direction and power seem in no way abated. The demands of rearmament and civil defence are taking more and more of the national attention, and great changes in our manner of life may be called for under pressure of external events. Is the book, therefore, irrelevant? Is there hope of interest being taken in any problems other than those of armament and defence? We feel, as Christians, that the very uncertainty of the human situation gives the book its relevance, and that for two reasons. In the first place the main task of Christians is to obey the will of God, and when the affairs of the world are in chaos, then is the time above all others for Christians to draw attention to the great facts of the Gospel and their significance for human life. Secondly, it is their duty to keep before them a picture of our life as a nation in all its aspects, and to work for those reforms which seem to be necessary here and now, lest all movements for change are submerged in a blind effort to preserve every feature, good and bad, of our society. Moreover, should war come, only those who have most fully grasped the significance of their faith and the demands it makes on men, will be in a position to respond adequately to such a time of testing. Only by using this respite to think out clearly the immediate activities which ought to concern us, in the light of the permanent

truths of the Gospel, shall we avoid the danger of later losing our grip of ultimate Christian convictions and hopes, because of the tragic nature of the events which threaten to overwhelm us.

It is then foolish for Christians to wait passively upon events. It is more than foolish, it is faithless. The fact that a great national effort is being made means that no limits can be set to what can be achieved constructively by Christians who are determined to make use of all the opportunities God has given them. Nor is it sufficient to concentrate exclusively on international affairs, vital as these obviously are. Great changes, too, are taking place in our social and political life, and these are closely linked with international politics; the one cannot be isolated from the other. When uncertainty exists everywhere as to the true end of life, Christians have to answer that uncertainty with a Gospel which is seen to be directly relevant to the whole of life. Is it possible to doubt that a Christian Church whose members were acting consciously and capably as Christians in their daily lives as citizens, would be the best possible witness of God's nature and His will for our time? This, after all, is what Christians are concerned with; not primarily with the temporal future of their friends or their country, but with the doing of God's will and the showing forth of

its nature to men, in whatever outward circumstances they may be placed. Yet it is equally clear that Christians are more confused about the problems of Christians in society and Christian citizenship than about most things. This book is an attempt to remove some of the confusion; but before embarking on our main theme let us look again at the contemporary cultural and spiritual background against which the issues raised later must be set.

The events of September 1938 were only the most startling instances of the growing dilemma of our country, a dilemma which is common to the whole of Western European civilization. In international affairs we have seen a steady deterioration from the time of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and in national affairs an economic depression on a scale not approached in this country before. We have never fully recovered from that depression and already our partial recovery is unsteady and the outlook uncertain, in spite of a gigantic expenditure on armaments. We have only trifled with the question of the Special Areas, and our unemployment figure remains at over one and a half millions. These facts are depressingly familiar; they indicate an apparent inability of our civilization to solve the problems with which it is beset on either a national



or an international scale. The contrast of our present situation with the high hopes that were entertained when the last war came to an end, is a sad commentary on the policies pursued by the victorious Governments. The impulse to carry out social reforms, to make a land fit for heroes to live in, and to create a new international order through the League of Nations continued almost throughout the third decade of the century. Even then progress was curiously slow and uneven, but from 1929 there has been an increasing disillusionment with, and in some countries a violent reaction against, the hopes of improvement and enlightenment which had so recently been entertained.

The roots of our distress lie deep. The Russian, Nicholas Berdyaev, with prophetic insight, wrote a book called *The End of Our Time* in 1923. The American, Reinhold Niebuhr, produced a collection of essays, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, in 1933. Others have referred to the "passing of Christendom" or the "end of the Christian era". Common to all these critics is the conviction that we are in one of the great epochs of change in human history, comparable to the break-up of the Roman Empire, or the gradual decay of the feudal structure of the Middle Ages. In political and social terms, indeed, we can say that the civiliza-

tion which is being transformed before our eyes is that one which was built up by the struggles of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and merchant capitalism, to free themselves from the medieval framework which was felt to be too restrictive. With the aid of the technical resources made available by the growth of natural science and the individualistic confidence in the capacity of human nature to tackle and solve all problems, this civilization achieved its greatest material successes in the nineteenth century, which was a time of amazing expansion of population, and goods and services, on a world scale.

Since then modern capitalist society has been faced by a growing dilemma which the last war obscured but did not solve. The further industrialization of the most powerful countries in the world and lack of fresh territory to develop, has seriously slowed the rate of expansion. This has led, on the one hand, to a growth of nationalist economic policies, and still further stifling of trade, and on the other, to an inability on the part of industrial countries to satisfy (from the proceeds of an expanding economy) the growing demands of the political democracy which modern industrialism has called into being. When it is remembered that in political democracy, the working classes are in a numerical majority, the contrast

between democracy in politics and autocracy in economic life becomes very striking. Here lies the root cause of the sluggish way in which our economic system is working, and here too lies one of the main causes of international chaos and antagonism. Here is the problem which our generation has to solve. But there is no guarantee that we shall solve it; we may very well relapse into another Dark Ages. So far the Western democracies have temporized, trying to postpone a decision, whilst the totalitarian states, like Germany, have taken desperate steps to solve it by forcefully submerging all in a regime of race, nation, or party.

Underneath this ferment is a profound spiritual conflict, and that is the only justification for drawing attention to it here. For our purpose is not to put forward a solution to the problems of our day, even if that were possible, but to state the fundamental truths of the Gospel in the setting of these problems. In a time of such rapid change and conflict it should be easier for Christians to understand the true nature of their faith than in times of security and tranquillity, when it is difficult to prevent the secular tainting the sacred or even to distinguish one from the other. Such is not the case to-day. In the democratic countries there is a failure of nerve, a lack of confidence in man.

The proud "humanism" which grew over-confident through technical achievements, and thought men needed only to be freed from superstitions and dogmas of all kinds, particularly religious superstitions, to achieve harmony and progress, is very much on the defensive. This is all to the good as far as Christianity is concerned, for confidence and complacency are the surest barriers in the way of taking the Christian Gospel seriously, because it is only a Gospel, that is, Good News, to those who realize their own inadequacy. Now that there is a questioning, dismayed feeling current, Christians have the opportunity and the obligation to clarify the message of their faith and to challenge their fellow-citizens to face squarely the searching questions it asks them. In totalitarian movements and countries there is a revulsion from the old individual self-confidence, and men and women serve with immense loyalty and self-sacrifice partial gods of class and blood, which, because of the absolute claims they make, are devils. Those drunk with these partial loyalties are not disposed to listen to the Word of God, and in that sense the situation is far less hopeful than in the democratic countries. But at least it drives Christians to see more clearly, by contrast, what are the fundamental truths to which their Gospel commits them. As the weakness or even the de-

monic character of the things which men are willing to trust is seen, so it is realized that the claims of Christianity raise the very deepest issues, and that the Church in asking the world "What think ye of Christ?" is asking the one central question.

These changes, moreover, have had a profound effect on the Church. It has found itself violently attacked and persecuted in many places, and has realized that it is a minority movement everywhere. Talk of Western Europe as "Christendom" or of Britain as a "Christian" country has to be abandoned. The Church feels itself to be "against" the world, that is, to be in conscious opposition to many of the major tendencies in the world around it. Those who call themselves Christians stand for certain definite convictions which are ignored in practice, where they are not definitely repudiated, by the majority of the citizens and most of the social institutions around them. Finding themselves attacked and hampered on all sides, the different Churches have been driven to realize the need for a common front, and to appreciate the urgency of a much greater inter-denominational and inter-confessional co-operation than has existed since the unity of the Church was split in the early years of the Church's history. It has begun to dawn, at least among non-Roman Catholic

Churches, that those who stand by the great Christian affirmations as they are expressed, for instance, in the Nicene Creed, have far more in common than the theological differences which divide them, particularly in view of the critical situation they are all facing. This has meant a great impetus to the Œcumenical Movement, which is the name given to that process of exchange of thought and clarifying of one another's positions which has been taking place between the leaders of the Churches. These Churches differ from one another as widely as the Greek Orthodox, the Lutheran, and the Anglican Churches, and the Society of Friends, to name only four. The two great World Conferences of the Churches in 1937, "Faith and Order" at Edinburgh, and "Life and Work" at Oxford, have led to a proposed World Council of the Churches to include both these approaches to the problem of Christian unity, and to further the work of inter-Church understanding and co-operation.

Much remains to be done, and the difficulties in the way should not be minimized, but a great deal of useful work has already been accomplished through the joint work of many of the ablest Christians in the world. In particular the Oxford Conference had to deal with the precise bearing of the Christian Faith upon the spiritual and

economic travail of the 1930's. That is why its title was "Church, Community, and State". The Church cannot merely say to a bankrupt world, "Repent ye, and believe in the Gospel", it has to answer a searching question which the world puts to it, namely, what exact contribution does this Gospel offer to those who find themselves in such a dangerous and unpleasant situation? Nor is it a mistaken question, for, although Christianity is concerned with more than this world, yet it is quite reasonable to demand from Christians an explanation of the light thrown upon current social and political problems by their Faith, and the nature of the solution it indicates. This is not to say that the solution will be an acceptable one, or that it will be in the same terms or on the same plane as the questioner expects, but at least Christians have to think the matter through, and to show the relevance of their religion to the whole of what the Oxford Conference called the "common life". Moreover, if they claim that the Christian Church has a Gospel which alone is adequate to meet the world's need, Christians have to answer those who point out that much of the world appears to have infected the Church. Why is the Church not more obviously the bearer of the good news for lack of which the affairs of men are in disorder? How can men be expected to listen

to an institution, which so effectively obscures the truth it is trying to proclaim?

It is with some of these questions that this book is concerned. It attempts to deal with one aspect of the relation of the Christian Faith to daily life, namely that covered by Section 3 of the Oxford Conference, which dealt with "Church, Community, and State in relation to the Economic Order". Furthermore it is concerned only with the British scene. In Britain, however, the situation is at present more hopeful than in many parts of the world. Owing to our greater wealth and our long tradition of parliamentary government we have been less affected by the turmoils of the post-war period than any European countries, except those of Scandinavia. Every year decreases that advantage; all the political and cultural conditions which make it possible to say that "Britain is different" are coming to an end. But they are not quite at an end yet, and just because we have more time to adjust ourselves to changing conditions, there may be a chance for us consciously to shape our future instead of being a prey to uncontrollable forces. In that adjustment a body of Christians who were consciously and devotedly fulfilling their tasks as citizens could play, as we have said earlier in this chapter, a most significant part: for though a minority, Christians have in



this country considerable potential influence. Much of the urgency and promise of the situation lies in the fact that as yet the majority of our countrymen have not adopted an alternative Faith, but are open to be captured by either a Christian or an anti-Christian loyalty. For this reason the question of Christians in society is one of prime importance. Unfortunately there is none about which Christian counsels are more divided and confused. We have never recovered from the chaos into which the rise of capitalism threw Christian thought on these issues, and have drifted along since then, borne by the course of events.

In an attempt to help in the process of clarification, we shall examine what the Christian Gospel is and how it is related to the everyday problems of life and conduct in society. Then we shall ask what we mean by society, how it gives rise to political issues, and in what way such issues are important for the Christian. From this arises the question as to why Christians differ so profoundly about immediate questions of policy and programmes, and what we mean by a Christian "solution" to any problem. We are led then to consider what is the peculiar depth of the Christian view of life which makes it of supreme importance in the social affairs of men, and to the narrower question which is bound up with it, what

is the function of the Church? Finally, in Chapter V, some practical suggestions are made, though necessarily in general terms, as to the immediate ways in which the Churches as corporate bodies and the individual Christians who compose them, can together learn to know the Will of God and to obey it, not only in personal but also in social affairs.

## CHAPTER I

### THE GOSPEL AND CONDUCT

CHRISTIANS are finding the world remarkably unresponsive to their ideals. Mussolini can lead Italy into imperialistic adventures which violate all the accepted standards of international conduct and the protests of outraged morality meet only with ridicule. Hitler can carve an empire out of Central Europe, setting aside solemn promises and ignoring appeals made in the name of humanity. Pogroms and concentration camps seem strange fruits of centuries of civilization. Respect for human personality, and ideals of freedom and justice must now bow to conquest made in the name of Blood and Empire. The hand of friendship is extended from a forest of bayonets. Instead of the sunshine of peace the sky is overcast by clouds of bombing aeroplanes, and goodwill perishes for lack of light. It seems a hopeless world for men of Christian ideals. Christians find this unresponsive world most bewildering. It would appear that those professing other ideals, National Socialist, Fascist, or Communist will inherit the earth. They have bridged the gulf

between hope and action, between what ideally they consider themselves to be, and the conduct which gives expression to these ideals. With the release of energy and power which this has brought in its train they have achieved a confidence and vigour matched in Christian history only by the Crusades and nineteenth-century missionary enterprise. The initiative seems now to have passed into other hands and amongst Christians the *laissez-faire* of impotence has replaced that of conviction.

In the realm of social achievement the Church has much to its credit in the past and few movements can match its record. It moulded the barbarians into civilized nations, administered justice and equity when, outside its government, brute force and savagery reigned supreme; it elevated warrior ideals into chivalry, and established international sanctions among petty feudal kingdoms. It is also possible to point to the great medieval synthesis, in which learning, art, philosophy, and good government flourished, and in which attempts were made to regulate the economic order in the interest of justice and humanity. With some confidence the Christian can call attention to "the growth of ordered liberty in the Protestant nations since the Reformation, to the abolition of slavery and to other social reforms,

and to the good results of modern missionary enterprise in various parts of the world".<sup>1</sup> However, even if this were the whole story, and even if it could not be offset by periods when the Church has been aligned with the forces of persecution, cruelty, exploitation, and reaction, it would not satisfy us. Not only is it impossible to rest on past achievements, but the claim of the Church is that it has the Word of Life for to-day, the Gospel of Peace, and a message of salvation to men. This claim must again be substantiated in deeds, not words. How is it that Christian idealism is at such a discount? Where are the new fruits of the Gospel?

## I

Not least amongst the reasons for the Christian's impotence is that he has equated Christianity with a series of principles some of which are taken direct from the New Testament and others deduced "in the spirit of the Gospels". It is not an unfamiliar experience in Christian societies to hear, "If only men would act in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount . . .", or "The Golden Rule is the essence of Christianity". These reflect much of the temper of the Church. When we consider the

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd. *History and the Gospel*.

ethical teachings of Jesus we cannot doubt but that a world ordered in keeping with them would be one in which life would be a holier, happier, truer thing than we now experience. The nearer we could get to love for our enemies, to uncalculating self-sacrifice, to a serene freedom from all self-regarding cares, and to a broad charity that never judges our neighbour, the better life would be. That much is clear, and it is equally apparent that having seen these principles we are under obligation to them. If that were the whole story, and to many Christians it appears to be, then Christians would, of all men, be the most pitiable, for their religion would consist solely of the unattainable, having no reference to immediate necessities, no means of bridging the gap between the desirable and the possible, and no outlet in conduct. These absolute standards explicitly affirmed in the New Testament writings are indeed the ideals towards which Christians are under an obligation to strive, but which nevertheless are unattainable. To love even our friends as we do ourselves is practically beyond us; how much less possible is it in the case of our enemies. Selfish cares, anger, lustful thoughts beset us at all points, and to approximate to Divine mercy exceeds our more honest hopes.

Though important as principles, these standards have religious value only in so far as they reveal

to us the nature of God. The birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are primarily a revelation of the nature of God, His relations with men, and consequently of the nature of Man, as a being who is both capable of the Crucifixion, and yet is of infinite worth in God's sight. The way from the moral teaching and absolute principles, and from all the recorded events in the Gospels to our everyday concerns and conduct is not that of direct application. It is, as we shall see, through the revelation of God contained in these Bible records.

The proclamation of the Gospel is for the Christian the declaration of the facts of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with the interpretation given to those facts by those who see in them the revelation of God. The preaching of the Apostles, by which men were "saved", concerned "Christ and Him crucified". In Corinth Paul preached "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that He appeared to Cephas. . . ." <sup>1</sup> "So," said Paul, "we preach, and so ye believed." In the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles we have a summary of what Peter constantly declared as the Gospel, and we

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv.

find him concerned with the events of the life of Christ, His death, and resurrection, and with their religious interpretation. The Gospels themselves follow the model of this preaching and constitute an expansion of it. They are not primarily memoirs of the life of Jesus Christ; in fact, it would be impossible, with the exception of the story of the Passion, to construct a life of Christ from them, after the manner of modern biographers. They are declarations of the Gospel, of the Good News of God which is brought to men in these events.

According to these same preachers the process of salvation consists in repentance, belief in the Gospel, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being called into the fellowship of those that have the same Spirit. In other words, having heard what God did in Jesus Christ those whose hearts were moved were asked to respond to God's initiative, and forsaking all other loyalties, to acknowledge this God, believing in Him, receiving His Spirit, His power, and being called into the "Fellowship of the Holy Spirit" which is the Christian Church. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" and we therefore turn to the New Testament to see in part, and in part to understand, what God is like, and how He comes to men. We see in the Gospel story, in the parables, sayings, actions,



death, and rising again of Christ—a constant showing forth of God's nature. Christ's friendly attitude to the outcasts of society, His triumph over the powers of evil, His attitude to sin, His tenderness to the sinner, His triumphant death, do not primarily constitute a call to us to seek to imitate Him, however far off, but they do show us God to whom we can turn and in whom we can confidently trust. The Good News is, therefore, of what God has done in Christ, and is constantly doing in and through His Church, and salvation consists in reposing our full trust in that God.

In whatever spirit therefore we approach the New Testament, whether our minds be full of questions concerning what we as Christians should do in the situation in which we find ourselves, or whether we look for some assurances which will strengthen us for the conflicts ahead, what we find is God's revelation of Himself, and what we are called upon to do is to make Him our first loyalty and, in the power of His communion with us and ours with Him, to face for ourselves the problems of personal and social life. The Gospel is the Good News that God is like that, that He dwelt among us, and proclaimed His Kingdom "at hand" into which, by accepting Him, we can now enter.

The central activities of the Christian life are

those "exercises" which take us to the heart of God's self-revelation; reading the Bible, worship, prayer, fellowship with others who have received the Spirit, communion with God in Christ, especially in the Eucharist, preaching, and hearing preached the Gospel as it was declared by the Apostles and written by the authors of the recorded Gospels. The response to these activities which is expected of us in daily life is that of obedience to this God in those situations and relationships in which we find ourselves. Power so to act comes both from constant communion with God, and from fellowship with other Christians. The Christian life is a life of action in response to this relationship between God and ourselves, a series of decisions made in accordance with our loyalty to Him. These decisions are always personal ones, whether they concern those matters about which effective action can be individual and immediate, or those requiring social and political action. This approach disposes of that constant but futile controversy as to whether the Christian is concerned with "changing hearts" or "changing systems"—with the individual's relations with God, or with the framework of society. Clearly, he must act in response to God in all the situations of life. Some of these situations are of a more immediate and "personal" character to which he

can respond adequately by individual action; others are more social, requiring collective action. Both, however, depend on a personal decision made in the light of the claims of the Kingdom of God.

As we shall see later, our judgements in these multifarious situations are open to many possibilities of error, not least amongst which is our partial apprehension of God's revelation. In this knowledge of God we should grow daily, but our best insights are but fragmentary and imperfect. The decisions we make, therefore, are likely to contain substantial elements of misunderstanding and error, and quite apart from any wilfulness or deliberate perversity on our part, we are unable to claim the title "Christian" for such judgements. The forgiveness and grace of God become very real factors in the situation even when we have done our best to understand His will and have sincerely devoted ourselves to it.

The Christian can constantly refer back to the historical reality of Jesus, who is interpreted as the perfect revelation of God, in whom all events find their true meaning. Any judgement, any decision, any seeming prompting of the Spirit must be tested against this revelation, this acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus—"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit which

confesseth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God."<sup>1</sup> It is by this central tradition of the New Testament writings that what we choose to do is judged, and as we enter into this tradition, so we establish the first and essential condition of Christian living.

## II

The Christian religion is, therefore, a Gospel of God, not a moral code, nor a system of social ethics, and the moral and ethical teaching of the Gospels is primarily of significance in that it sheds light on our understanding of the character and activities of God. To affirm this, however, does not deprive the Christian religion of ethical content: on the contrary it gives it greater significance in this realm than could ever be attained by a finite code of ethical principles. In both the Old and New Testaments the world is seen as the sphere of God's action and man's response; in fact, the story is one of God's actions, through Moses, the Prophets, and in Christ. The ethical systems, moral attainments, and the religious purity of the existing order of society were constantly called into question and new initiative to

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 2-3.

moral action was provided. The continuous coming of God into situations whenever the Gospel is preached or apprehended, or the Eucharist celebrated, far from lessening the ethical significance of the faith, puts man under a permanent moral demand.

The God who is with us in every situation is revealed in Jesus Christ as a loving Father giving to men a value, not because of their merit or worth, but because of His nature. God's relation with men becomes therefore the standard of human relationships, and ethics spring from this Divine source. Many attempts have been made, and are continuously being made, to codify this ethical initiative and to reduce it to generalized principles. This attempt is not in general of any great value. The step from our apprehension of God to decision in a concrete situation will usually be immediate. This does not mean that our judgements can truly be made without a careful study of the facts of any situation. Though immediate, decision is not irrational. Neither does it mean spiritual and ethical anarchy. Judgements made in the "immediate" sense indicated above will need constantly to be checked both by prayer and discussion.

The Christian experiences a conflict between his life in worship and in communion with God, and

his life in his personal and social relations with his fellow-men. He is necessarily at war with the standards of the world and with the embodiment of these standards in custom, convention, and law. God's love for men, shown forth in His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, is in striking contrast to men's relations with each other. The Kingdom of God is an established reality in the coming of Christ and in the presence of His Spirit in the world. It has not yet, however, triumphed in the world: it has still to be completed. The Christian therefore must seek to discover the best means whereby human evil can be checked and, at the same time, increase the opportunities of love within a sinful world. In other words, although his experience is of the love of God, his social concern is with the establishment of justice: from adoration at the foot of the Cross he turns to the task of defining and maintaining the good which each member of the community may rightfully claim in the harmony of the whole. "Love must will justice, and the Christian is under an obligation to secure the best possible social and economic structure."<sup>1</sup> Though this experience of God's love is an ideal beyond the possibility of achievement in the field of social life, nevertheless it is a basis for judging between the various alternative possible

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Conference Report*. Section 3.

systems of justice. It is an experience which gives us the power to discern the best from all the possibles. It gives positive guidance, in terms of justice, even though it transcends all social structures. This love of God means that we must take every opportunity of increasing the possibilities of men and women developing more fully their God-given gifts; of minimizing luxury and pride and removing want and insecurity. In general terms like these we have a sure and certain guide. If, however, we seek to particularize further we enter the sphere of action where Christians may and do differ. The Christian, then, may be said to enter into the personal and social situations of life with the constant presence of a loving God and with certain generalizations which describe his experience of God and its general meaning in terms of human relationships. He does not possess a set of rules nor a body of law for which he can claim Divine sanction and authority.

Christian experience produces a mass of confused policies and a variety of advice and plans. Out of them it is important to achieve some degree of order and as much agreement as possible. Faulty religious insight and personal prejudice enter in to obscure the will of God and give rise to conflicting suggestions as to the appropriate action in given circumstances. The way in which these

factors operate will be examined later in this book. We note them here as the authors of confusion. They do not, however, invalidate the main contention of this chapter. They imply that much more than personal devotion, personal reflection, and personal decision is needed if we are effectively to relate the Gospel to conduct. This "something more" may be found in the activities of the Christian Church.

The Church preserves and declares that which has been received by it, the Gospel tradition. This is not something alterable, but is a final and ultimate declaration made once for all. Its interpretation varies from age to age, and from place to place, and ultimate finality cannot be claimed for any particular meaning given to it. The facts, however, of the life of Jesus, and the claim that they have an unique and ultimate significance, remain constant. In other words, that which is to be reinterpreted and reunderstood in every place, and in every age, is the unchanging Gospel. It is against this tradition, preserved and expounded within the fellowship of the Church, that all our decisions and choices must be set. In the worshipping and praying community, the Christian Fellowship, such decisions must be brought into the limelight of this worship, made the subject of corporate prayer, and, in discussion within the



body of Christians, checked and tested against the religious experience of others whose loyalty is to the same God. This requires a purifying of the worship of the Church, and above all a closer connection between it and the daily concerns and vocations of its members. This integration of life and worship is not merely necessary in order to relate the Gospel to our personal problems, but as a social act of the whole Christian congregation on which depends, to some extent, the possibility of ensuring that the decisions made are more adequately related to the central Christian revelation and are not solely the result of private meditation. The individualization of religious life has been a source of weakness in Christian witness, and it is imperative to restore again the sense of corporate responsibility.

We must bring our problems and judgements before the congregation of Christians, in order that in common prayer and common worship, in an effort to relate these to the revelation of God in Christ, we may be more assured that the solutions accepted are at least nearer to the mind of God than would otherwise be the case. But if this is to happen the Christian Churches must develop a family life in addition to their congregational worship. To appreciate this one need only consider the amount of mutual trust and confidence re-

quired if Trade Unionists and Works Directors, within the same congregation, are to bring before the assembled Christian people their industrial concerns and problems in anything more than very generalized terms, and remain assured that what is said will not be used "in evidence against them" in Chambers of Commerce or in Trade Union branches, or on public platforms. It is also necessary, within the Christian nucleus or family, supplied with as much of the factual data and results of researches as is readily available, to distinguish the actual possibilities in any given situation and to judge between them. Regular and systematic discussion of this kind should characterize the activity of the Christian Church, and even though majority findings alone are possible—and in most instances this will be the case—these will give some guidance to the Christian which otherwise would not be available.

An obvious sphere for this kind of activity is in groups of people engaged in the same or similar forms of employment. Their problems and needs are roughly the same and the starting-point, as far as experience is concerned, is one about which their knowledge is intimate and direct. Beginning with the data already to hand in their experience, a descriptive statement of the work in which the members of the group are involved

can be built up, its main features and the various possibilities for increasing just relations within it noted, and a selection made such as could or should command the allegiance and support of those who have selected them. Though the findings of such groups, and the consequent actions of its members could not claim Divine sanction, they would at least be the product of greater thought and prayerfulness than would otherwise obtain. They would also have the merit of being pedestrian and actual, couched not in terms of ideals but of possibilities which can be realized in daily activity. Doubtless from this procedure, over a period of time a body of practice would be built up in Christian groups. It would be of a precise character, like the "virtue" of thrift in the nineteenth century, rather than in general terms such as "the sacredness of human personality".

### III

It should be appreciated that, in general, the Christian does not create the alternative lines of conduct from which he has to choose, and it is unusual to find, to-day at least, the Church in a position to produce possibilities which are not

already present. Much less is the choice ever between that which is obviously and clearly seen to be good and that which is in direct contradiction to the Gospel revelation. There is no "Christian" solution for us to adopt, and, consequently, in choosing the best alternative we cannot thereby be said to be compromising. A simple illustration arises out of the war between Japan and China. The housewife in England has a number of alternative ways of acting towards the combatants and their respective causes, and perhaps the most effective line of conduct is through her shopping-basket. She can "buy Japanese" and refuse to "buy Chinese" or vice versa. She could, of course, refuse to do either, in which case she passively permits the victory of the stronger of the two combatants by taking no action to strengthen the hands of the weaker. What she cannot do is create a further possibility which, being a Christian, she can wholeheartedly acclaim as *the* Christian line of conduct. There are haloes around the heads of neither the Chinese nor Japanese, and whichever of the actual possibilities before her she selects, her choice is between what she, in council with her fellow-Christians, considers the more just, and not what is the embodiment of complete justice. In so doing she is not compromising. She is making the best possible

decision under the circumstances. An important part, therefore, of the activity of Christians is making clear, at least to themselves, the alternatives that offer themselves and some of the consequences of pursuing any of them, in order that in the experience of worship and in discussion, the juster of the possibilities may be chosen and acted upon.

As we have seen earlier, our experience of God in worship and prayer will always contrast with the quality of our relationship with our fellows in pursuing the line of conduct we choose to adopt in any given circumstances. This should neither drive us into denying a relationship between the holiness, majesty, and love of God, and immediate programmes of social and political reorganization, nor into identifying God with a chosen programme. It is, in the first instance, a reason for extending the area over which we are prepared to assume responsibility for choice. For example, if we find unemployment incompatible with our knowledge of God, one reaction is that which accepts it as a necessary evil and may consider it spiritual discipline (usually for someone else). This makes religion a refuge from apparently insoluble problems. Another reaction is to sponsor a particular remedy and call it the will of God, insisting that all who bear the name Christian must

necessarily accept this remedy. A third attitude is that which leads a Christian to assume responsibilities in politics on the same scale as that on which the problem is soluble, and this may be national or even international, avoiding at the same time the errors of the two previous positions.

This divergence between religious and social experience is also the source of ethical initiative, of the renewal of the active life of the Christian, and, at times like these, when events crowd in upon each other, this renewal is a daily necessity. The two errors noted above are ones to which Christians are very prone. The first considers all systems of justice and all possible choices so inferior to religious experience as to justify refusal to make a choice. The second identifies such choices as are made with the will of God and claims Divine sanction for them. Choose we must, but the choice we make is *our* choice of the political and personal alternatives offered by a sinful world, and, to-day, at any rate, a world in which the Christian Church has lost the initiative. In the next chapter we shall examine how the majority of these choices involve us in political action. For example, if we wish to remove young children from dangerous and injurious employment we cannot depend solely upon the innate goodness, or the religious conversion of individual

employers. Social action is necessary, effected through a political party, and our proposals would need to be embodied in legislation which is supported ultimately by collective force. The establishment of healthy conditions of work for men is, again, a function of Trade Union (i.e. social) activity, and this not merely considering the Unions as a militant factor on the side of workmen's rights, but also because of the necessity of uniform standards throughout economic life. When, therefore, the Christian Group has disentangled the various alternative lines of action, and has made its choice, or series of choices (since they are not bound to agree), a further step is necessary to pave the way for effective action. It must choose between the various political and social groupings through which adequate political power can be put into the service of the chosen objective to make it possible of achievement. For this purpose some codification of immediate objectives is essential, some attempt to piece together into a programme our immediate judgements, since it is on the basis of this programme that we make our choice of a political or social movement. This political action involves co-operation with non-Christians, and this is possible because as soon as we decide what it is we wish to achieve we discover that other people, probably for quite different

reasons, have the same immediate objectives, and for the purpose of their attainment it is possible to combine, though on matters of faith the divergences may be profound.

#### IV

Fellowship within the Christian Church may be of such a kind that from it we can enter political and social struggles with less likelihood of our becoming uncritically immersed in political technique and diplomacy or concerned more with political statecraft than with justice. The richness of the life of that community whose reason for existence is not like-mindedness on social judgements but common allegiance to God, gives us actual experience of loving relationships as we embark on establishing greater justice through politics. The greater love in the one community ensures the greater justice in the other. Once they become separated, the Church becomes "other worldly" and political life without a real quality of justice.

The Christian life, therefore, is a series of personal choices made in obedience to an ever-present God, and fashioned within the Christian congregation. Perhaps the closest parallel in



human terms is the determining influence in decisions and choices of one's love or admiration for other persons. Memories and recollections of mother, father, wife, husband, friend, enter into all that we do, impelling us to choose one alternative rather than another, to behave in certain ways, in keeping, not with their specific instructions, for they may never have given any which are sufficiently explicit for us to have as certain guidance, but in keeping with the love we bear them and they bear us, and with the kind of people they are. We may recall their sayings, their actions, their looks, and to ensure that we have not mistaken their intentions nor missed something of the depth of their love for us we shall discuss them with mutual friends. The parallel must not be pushed too far, but it is sufficient to indicate something of the nature of God's guidance to us. In a similar manner we can reflect upon the activities of Jesus Christ—His ways of dealing with men, His manner of dealing with situations, and so in response to Him we receive more of His Spirit. We join, therefore, in Bible study, in worship, in prayer, in discussion, in the Eucharist, and by these means we learn of Him and draw closer to Him. He is with us and His love and His readiness for companionship will guide us in choosing a line of conduct from the

possibilities with which we are hourly presented. To help our understanding both of God and of the world in which our choices are made we join with those whose love for God and loyalty to Him is, in intention, like our own, in considering and making our choices.

Our real alternatives are always quite specific and never in terms of vast generalizations. We are not offered the choice between an equalitarian order of society and its opposite. Our choice is, for example, between making the Exemption Clause of the New Education Act operative or inoperative; joining a Trade Union or not joining; shopping at the Co-op, or at a private store; buying Japanese goods or declining them; subscribing for milk for Spanish republicans or refusing to do so; and, if we are middle class, sending our children to this or that school. It is in terms such as these, or their equivalent in our own life and experience, that we further justice or injustice. It is in these ways that we act in obedience to God or fail to do so. From series of such choices made in the manner suggested above, a body of thought and conduct is created which, for a time, may guide the Christian in his conduct and determine his political allegiance. It must be "for a time" only, for at the heart of his life is the Gospel of God and this alone is absolute.

The assumption of full social responsibility as Christians necessitates also an understanding of our social context. It is this we must now consider.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NECESSITY OF POLITICS

CHRISTIAN obedience requires, on the one hand, the encouragement and checks of the Christian Fellowship, and on the other, co-operation with both Christians and non-Christians in social action. In other words obedience demands both Church membership and political action. The assertion that politics are necessary requires further elaboration and, in addition, in order that we may discern the nature of current political issues and opportunities, we must engage in an analysis of society. A society is held together by a series of customs, of things which are "done" or "not done", creating confidence or lack of it. Within it men behave in general ways which enable it to cohere. Some of these are defined by law, but many are normally accepted habits of thought and action requiring no external coercion for their enforcement, and frequently not even explicit assertion. At present we are in a capitalistic society and these habits and customs, laws and regulations are derived from the necessities of capitalism. It is these we are to analyse in order

that when social forces affect our personal lives, we may know before making judgements, the framework within which they have arisen and on the basis of which any attempt to alter them must be made.

## I

The impotence of Christians does not arise solely because of their confusion between ideals and religion, neither is it a characteristic of Christians alone. Another major source is the failure to recognize the nature and importance of politics. This shows itself in the "carry-over" into an unliberal era of the habits of thought and conduct of a liberal society, and in the belief not merely in the virtues of a "sturdy individualism", but also in the effectiveness of independent individual action. The word "liberal" has been given so varied a content that some attempt must be made to define its use here and to distinguish liberal society from other forms of social organization, and, in particular, from those that are now in the making in the twentieth-century world. In the last section of Chapter III the word "liberal" will be used to describe those habits of mind, and systems of philosophy and theology, which coincide with what is here called liberal social organ-

ization. To designate the nineteenth-century British society as liberal is not a full description of it but merely a selection of its main features. Obviously it contained within it remnants of the old feudal structure as well as the beginnings of modern society, but these do not dominate its period of greatest achievement and are evident mainly at its beginning and end respectively.

The distinguishing feature of liberal society is that, on the whole, the social order is not in accordance with a fixed plan, determined and enforced from above, but is the unforeseen and unintended product of innumerable individual actions. The rising commercial classes of sixteenth and seventeenth-century England demanded that the State interfere less and less with them in the pursuit of their activities, and in the defeat of Charles and Laud they achieved power to enforce their own will. Cromwellian government was the last effective attempt to order society as a whole. It was, in part, an effort to use autocratic power in the later feudal manner on behalf of the commercial classes, and in part the forerunner of a democratic system too advanced in conception both for that age and for this. The Restoration, after various ups and downs, resulted eventually in the freedom of commerce from crippling restraints, and, aided and abetted both by the Protestant temper and an

expanding Colonial Empire, the preaching and practice of unco-ordinated and unplanned individualism began to characterize the whole of social and economic life.

In such a society every individual pursued his own independent line of conduct, acting within the framework of law which was mainly concerned with "holding the ring". He was guided rationally by self-interest, and by that sense of responsibility which involves non-interference with other people's legitimate spheres of activity, but which has no positive interest in the secondary social effects of his actions. Liberal society is the most typical expression of political individualism. The forms which such a society take are not the product of forethought and planning. They are no one's creation and over them no one assumes control. They grow up as a result of a series of individual actions.

Two conditions made such social life possible. The first was incessant political and economic expansion, and the second an inheritance of a spiritual tradition from a previous age. Economic expansion made it possible to raise the general level of social well-being without seriously affecting the class structure of society. The problems which arose from class tension could, on the whole, be shelved, immediate demands being met by

further economic activity, as, for example, the extension of markets, and the production of increased wealth, without greatly altering the proportions in which it was distributed or diminishing the social power of those who owned most. Political expansion and the development of a colonial and economic Empire opened outlets to adventurers and dissenters. Those who found life at home unbearable need not stay at home to press to an issue their grievances, and those in power at home need not attempt their redress, because it was possible for the malcontent to find a new and freer life, or at least to establish his own kind of autocracy, in other parts of the world. In England it must also be acknowledged that centuries of uninterrupted tradition in social and personal life produced a conformity of thinking and feeling in the essential spheres of life. There was an accepted "life pattern" based on the Christian religion and on social experience which gave content and real meaning to phrases such as "behaving like a gentleman", "common sense" and the like. Individualist society was held together both by the easing of its inherent tensions, owing to continuous economic and political expansion, and by a common religious tradition, developed in years of freedom from invasion, which permeated the whole of life.



Both these conditions are in process of disappearing, and with them the society which they made possible. Far from experiencing continuous political and economic expansion we have of late passed through the severest economic depressions in our history, and met them by restrictions upon international trade and limitation of the area in which economic and political enterprise is conducted. It is no longer possible to escape economic class conflict by enlarging the scope of trading enterprises, and the period of easy movement into new countries as a means of easing intolerable burdens has come to an end. Economic crises and national conflicts are formidable reminders of the disappearance of the basic characteristics of nineteenth-century society. Along with these factors we are fast exhausting our spiritual heritage. The optimistic belief in progress, in an underlying benevolent purpose in life, the belief in the inherent goodness of men (at least of English men!), the acceptance of the Christian tradition and of standards derived from it, these have been confronted by the realities of nationalism at home and abroad and have been shattered by the development of class consciousness and class warfare at home. Class struggles rage in Europe and a world war is a possibility with which the serious minded must reckon. The con-

fidence rooted in a spiritual tradition and in national isolation has given way to disillusionment both in personal and social life.

Along with the disappearance of these basic conditions we have also seen a change in economic and social organization, the most important being in industrial life. In industry the changes that have taken place over the past few years are of the greatest significance. The old form of industrial enterprise in which there was competition between large numbers of comparatively small firms is being replaced by large scale industry, and in some cases by monopolies. Even where the scale of the industry has not been substantially altered, and where monopolies are far from complete, price agreements and agreements on other factors in production and distribution have brought hitherto competing units closer together. Competition has by no means been eliminated, but the process of centralization of industrial control has proceeded far enough for the observer to recognize a new and potent power in the social situation, the power of combined industrialists. The replacement of competitive capitalism by monopoly capitalism has brought with it corresponding political changes involving the interference of the State in industrial affairs, and of financial and industrial groups in the policies of the State. These factors we must

---

examine later. Let us note here, however, that one of the main features of liberal society is in process of disappearing, and with it the liberal order itself. Whereas at one time it was possible, though perhaps not wise, to ignore politics, so long as the law made it practicable for one to engage in free movement and free enterprise, now, with the elimination of both these "freedoms", politics assumes supreme importance, for it is only through politically powerful groups of people that any substantial personal or social objective can be realized.

It is to-day apparent that the sphere of effectiveness of the isolated individual is becoming less and less. As large scale enterprise becomes more and more a feature of industrial life, and as it becomes clearer that what happens in one part of the world affects all the other parts, so the power of the individual diminishes and the necessity of politics becomes obvious. For example, nothing decisive can be done with regard to the Sino-Japanese conflict except through the State, and the individual is powerless with regard to the State, except in and through a political party or popular movement. Nothing effective can be done with regard to the wages, hours, and conditions of labour of workers in large scale industry except through powerful Unions, or Federations of employers, or through

political parties. The individual employer or worker is powerless in the face of unemployment unless he meets it in co-operation with those of his fellows who agree with him with regard to a solution or mitigation of the problem, and in this way harnesses political power to his views. Not one of the major problems of life to-day is amenable to effective action except in and through political and social movements.

This being the case, the attempt to carry over the practices and methods which were effective in a liberal era into present-day society is likely to meet with disappointing results and produce a spirit of defeatism and disillusionment. The good intentions themselves are often abandoned merely because the method has proved outmoded. Our immediate objectives must be realized over a considerable area of social life or not at all, and to provide this result the method of action must be political, and the instrument a social movement capable of influencing concentrations of social power or of themselves assuming such power. Political action, that is, action in and through a social movement, is therefore a necessity if we are to make effective our judgements on the justice or injustice of those relationships which form part of our experience.

Politics is concerned with the relation between

those groups into which society divides itself for the purpose of achieving certain objectives or defending privileges; and political method is that whereby agreements can be reached between these groups, and order and security maintained. The scale on which life is organized prevents our aims being attained by personal contacts and conversations, and so these groups are a necessity. Such groupings of people are morally less sensitive than individual persons, and relations between them are on a markedly lower moral plane. To appreciate this we need only compare our attitude to an aggressor nation, like Japan or Germany, with our attitude to individual Japanese or Germans, or the standard of honesty between neighbours, with that which characterizes diplomacy. This does not mean that moral demands are not made of groups and nations, but that the possibility of achieving a high standard is less than in the case of personal relationships.

It is, therefore, vital that in the realm of political action we should demonstrate our obedience to God, and the religion which is solely concerned with personal relations with God and has no connection with this political life and these political issues is irrelevant over an increasing area of life and is devoid of meaning just at the point where most guidance is needed. If it is true that

in politics is a more important sphere of Christian witness than most Christians admit, it is also the case that in political and social phenomena we meet the most serious challenges to our experience of communion with God and our fellowship with other Christians. Political life is the real battlefield, and crusading must lead us thither.

## II

In a highly industrialized society like that of Great Britain the most significant movements are those which have arisen from industrial experience, taken together with their counterparts in the realm of party politics. It is not the purpose of this book to trace the historical development of these industrial and political organizations. We merely note their existence and discuss their significance in the social life of the country, in order that we may recognize the secular forces with which it is possible to ally ourselves.

The rise of the Trade Union movement is one of the clearest indications of the growing necessity, during the nineteenth century, of concerted social action in the achievement of ends which would contribute to the satisfaction of personal needs. Improvements in wages and hours and in condi-

tions of work were only possible in so far as those desiring these ends combined together to attain them. The area over which combination was essential gradually increased, expanding mainly from craft-organizations until a National Trade Union movement, capable of national action, came into existence with the formation of the Trades Union Congress.

In this we witness a double change. Firstly a change from individual contracts and individual agreements to collective and group contracts, and secondly a change from the early days of Craft-Unionism to the era of "political" unions. The Trade Union movement is one of the most powerful social organizations of our time, and apart from it little can be achieved which permanently and securely affects and improves the conditions of workers. Any struggle for social justice for workers which is related to their employment cannot effectively take place without co-operation with the Unions. In such matters, however personal and individual may be our crusade, it is comparatively ineffective unless at some point it seeks to set the power of organized workers in Unions behind it. In addition it can be affirmed that the average conditions of workers, whether in Unions or not, is determined by the minimum standards agreed upon by organized workers and

organized or individual employers. The influence of this compact and national organization of workers spreads far beyond the membership, especially on such matters as are the subject of Union agreements. "Above Union rates" is a common phrase on the lips of those who consider that the conditions of workers in their factories are good. Whether directly or indirectly, therefore, we see that the organized body of workers is a determinative factor in the social situation, distinguishing modern society from that of the nineteenth century. It is one manifestation of the increased importance of political and social organization, and a concrete instance of the necessity of acting through such organizations if we wish to be effective concerning that which our conception of justice demands.

Two other industrial movements underline this assertion. Firstly, that amongst employers and "capitalists". The stronghold of individualism has been stormed from without, mainly by Trade Unions, but its downfall is largely due to defection within. Those to whom it was a part of their creed that every man stood on his own feet, that agreements should be between man and man (and not between the employer and organized workers in Unions), that individualism and competition were of the essence of industrial and commercial



activity, to surrender which would be to abandon the source of enterprise and to undermine the foundations of our greatness as an industrial nation—these men are now the apostles of combination, “rationalization”, and trustification, seeking to abandon what they now consider wasteful trade rivalry. In some instances this has proceeded so far as to create virtual monopolies; in others the process is far from complete, but is steadily progressing in the same direction. Employers’ federations which had so uneasy a beginning in the nineteenth century, because at that time they were contradictions in terms, now rank alongside Trade Unions as powerful, centralized social movements, outside which it is becoming increasingly impossible to act either as an employer or to influence the activities of employers.

In the second place this organizational trend in industry has tended to remove the owner-employer from close and intimate touch with the productive or distributive processes. His place is taken by a technically trained manager. The employer now sits on a board of directors which is concerned largely with financial policy, and the actual management of the industry in the factory or workshop is in the hands of skilled employees. This has led to the creation of a group of men professionally interested in management, and not

usually personally interested in profits. In keeping with the trends among employers and workers, these managers have also united in Management Associations, to establish professional standards of management and to discuss and study common problems. They constitute the industrial "Third Estate", and their importance in the future organization of industry cannot easily be over-estimated. This movement is the newest creation of industrial change and its form and policy are still in the making. What is clear, however, is that as a social organization affecting industrial policy it has great importance.

Trade Unions, Employers' Federations, and Management Associations are the ever-present justification for asserting that apart from social action, that is action in and through one or other of these social movements, it is becoming increasingly impossible effectively to pursue a programme of industrial reforms for the enhancement of social justice. Politics are clearly necessary.

Alongside these developments, and mainly because of them, the State has been called upon to intervene increasingly in industrial affairs, contrary to the accepted principles of the earlier period. Beginning with factory legislation affecting the employment of children, young persons,

and women, State action has developed until, in recent times, it has become habitual to look to the government for subsidies to necessitous industries, solutions of the problems of unemployment, measures against foreign competition, arbitration in industrial disputes, enabling legislation for the trustification of industry, and scores of other actions directly affecting the government of industry. This enlargement of the sphere in which State intervention is considered legitimate and desirable has enhanced the importance of parliamentary politics, since it is clear that a group which desires to dominate industrial life must also seek the same power in Parliament. The difference in the methods of achieving power in industry and in politics gives rise to one of the most important social issues of our day. In politics power is apportioned in accordance with the results of an election based on universal suffrage, whereas in industry ownership and power go hand in hand, checked, but not seriously undermined, by organized workers, organized management, and legislation. This can only work smoothly to-day as long as political power is exercised in the interests of this industrially powerful group. In a conflict between the two the victory of one or the other method of apportioning power will determine the future structure of society for a long time to come.

Amateur politicians sometimes mistakenly assume that the State can act in such a way as to distribute both the power within industry and the fruits of industrial activity in accordance with some conception of justice objectively arrived at and impartially administered. In practice, however, one or other party dominates industrial and political policy and there is no supreme judge who can, in a detached manner, divide the spoils of industrial enterprise, supported by the power of the State. Admittedly each group has to take into account the strength of the others. A Labour Government which sought to enhance the power of Trade Unions and of working-class consumers in industry would have its programme modified by the opposition from the Conservative Party and the Employers' Federations. Similarly, a Conservative Government would be influenced by the strength of Labour Party and Trade Union opposition. Nevertheless, however much modified in these ways, the Government's power cannot be considered as exercised in the capacity of judge equitably dividing resources and power. There can be no such judge. Politics is a conflict between "haves" and "have-nots" and in the political-industrial struggle it is clearly impossible to satisfy the demands of all the parties and interests concerned. It is always a matter of mak-

ing the best bargain possible, and the result is dependent upon the relative strengths of the parties and organizations concerned. The close identity between the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, and the Conservative Party and Capitalists derives from this necessity. An increase in wages, for example, gained by the Unions, means either a decrease in immediate profits (in which case the investor suffers) or an increase in price (in which case the first sufferer, at any rate, is the consumer—whatever may be the long-distance repercussions of such action). In any such conflict the issue is determined on a basis of industrial power and party politics, and there can be no third authority which is disinterested and which can impartially judge such an issue and enforce its "impartial" judgement. Certainly this hypothetical "third party" cannot be the State since the power of the State is wielded by whatever political party is in power—and as has been shown such parties are not disinterested.

It should be noted too, that this trend in the direction of industrial federation and combination has a marked effect upon the international policies advocated by the party political movements which spring out of the industrial situation. Recognition of the class struggle in other countries leads political parties to advocate foreign policies which

will, in the main, enhance the well-being of their counterparts in these countries. In this way the international class struggle shows itself more clearly every day. The policy of the British Government with regard to the U.S.S.R., Germany, Spain, Italy, and China, and the policies advocated by British Left Wing movements in these connections in recent years, is a clear illustration of this trend.

Conflict is of the essence of politics and it is in conflict that we serve the cause which we have espoused in the name of social justice, and as we have seen, politics is increasingly the sphere in which we must exercise our judgement and through which we must act to make our decisions effective.

### III

In this struggle there can, therefore, be no supreme judge empowered equitably to administer the whole. Neither is there a course of conduct nor a political policy which can be hailed as the perfect embodiment of the Christian religion. Christians do not create political alternatives, neither can they hope to stem the tide which brings in a monopolistic and machine age, any more than King Canute could restrain the rising sea. They

must learn to harness these forces to serve their purposes, and not to deny them. To this end the Christian is offered a choice between alternative lines of action all of which contain elements of evil and in their turn will result in some injustices. The "ideal Christian alternative" is never presented to us as a possibility even if it were capable of being visualized. It is necessary to choose the policy and programme which in our opinion would, of all those which are practicable, most enhance the justice we desire to see. This means that in politics the Christian has to choose what, in his opinion, is the least of many evils, and in making this choice to appreciate that he is, honestly, though maybe mistakenly, seeking to serve God. In making his choice of the possible alternatives, however undesirable they may all appear to be when examined in the light of his experience of God and of the Christian Fellowship, he is thereby acting in obedience to God. Refusal to make a choice because of the evil he can discern in all the possibilities that lie before him is denying God. It removes God from the processes of life and considers Him inactive in the affairs of men. In a wage dispute between workers and employers the Christian must frequently choose between enduring the injustice of underpayment, in which he and his family all suffer

together, and adopting strike action by which he may obviate the first evil though doubtless the strike will seriously injure someone else. Of these two possible lines of conduct one must be chosen though both contain evil, and, in choosing, the Christian must seek to act in the light of his experience of God. A more familiar illustration can be taken from international affairs. The alternative international policies between which men have to choose are confusing mixtures of good and evil and, in the last resort, pacifism and participation in war, as alternatives, have to be faced. Both pacifism and war have, as their immediate consequences, considerable evils and injustices, yet the Christian must, in obedience to God, choose one or the other when diplomacy has failed. In so choosing he expresses his Christian faith in the only possible way. This is not to say that all Christians will, of necessity, make the same choice, and the reason for their differences will be considered in the next chapter.

It is a denial of God to refuse to choose. It is equally mistaken to identify your choice with the Will of God. Whereas the first removes God from history, the second identifies Him with history. The selection is the Christian's responsibility, and in making it he recognizes the possibility of error in his judgements and insights, and his need of



forgiveness. To assert that all Christians should be strikers or that all Christians should be pacifists may be expressions of your own judgement and may constitute valuable propaganda slogans. As religious claims they cannot be substantiated. They should therefore be prefaced by "in my opinion".

There may, nevertheless, be a general agreement among Christians on major social issues, and this possibility was realized in the Oxford Conference (1937) on "Church, Community, and State". At this Conference leaders, both clerical and lay, of the Churches throughout the world met together to consider on what points such agreement was possible and these are indicated in their reports. Section 3 of the Conference was concerned with "The Church and the Economic Order", and its report commends certain points to the serious attention of Christians. In the first place the report draws attention to a fact the significance of which has not yet been fully grasped by Christians. Agricultural and industrial progress during the past generation has made it technically possible to secure a decent minimum standard of life for every member of modern society. It is important not to exaggerate the total productive capacity of the world, as much of the talk of "poverty in plenty", particularly by advocates of

Social Credit, does; but it remains true that *crippling* poverty is no longer necessary. This is by far the greatest benefit which technical progress has conferred on mankind. It marks off our time from the period of the New Testament and from all other periods in which Christian thinking about economic life has been formulated. How great, therefore, is our moral responsibility for the continuance of undernourishment and bad social and physical conditions. Until we have taken steps to create a political and economic organization which will take advantage of these new technical conditions and distribute capital and commodities more advantageously, we shall be guilty of a serious neglect of our obvious duty as Christian citizens.

With this general background the first criticism the conference made was that existing economic and social arrangements enhance acquisitiveness. Freedom to enjoy the good things of life through education, in economic security, in travel, in easy access both to materials and to leisure, depends almost entirely upon the amount of money the individual can acquire for himself. In order to achieve these good things, acquisitiveness on a grand scale has to be developed. False standards arise from this feverish scramble for wealth and money, and a false respect for those who win in

the struggle, for the wealthy and rich. This struggle for the means whereby to live the good and free life is degrading alike to those who win and those who lose and is a disintegrating factor in any society. Acquisitiveness, and its attendant spiritual evils, characterizes a good deal of industrial life and the basic quality of its organization. As long as this remains the case it is a challenge to the convictions of Christian men and women. It is useless attacking the "spirit of greed" so long as acquisitiveness is expressed in the organized economic life of society.

Disparities of wealth, in all countries considerable, were held by the conference to be destructive of community life. The great inequalities of modern social life, quite apart from whether the average possible standards could be high or low, keep people apart, and render fellowship impossible. The products of industry are distributed so unequally that a small minority of the population receive incomes exceeding in the aggregate those of many times their number. This small minority escape bad housing, slum conditions, and frustration, whereas the rest of society endures unnecessarily all the penalties of poverty. The average income of the population of Great Britain is estimated to be slightly less than £200 per annum per recipient. 1.5% of those receiving incomes get

£1,000 or more per annum, and secure 22·5% of the National Income. The middle class, receiving incomes of £250 to £1,000 per annum, constitute 11% of the recipients, and receive 20% of the National Income. The remaining 87·5% receive between them 55·5% of the National Income. In addition, owing to geographical separation and the disparity of power which derives from wealth and poverty, both rich and poor lose heavily in culture and community life. Between them are raised these insuperable barriers. They never meet on the equal terms necessary to true community. They can never know each other. Gross inequalities of this kind should not be tolerated by Christians.

No one except the enemies of equality has ever taken this to mean absolute equality of incomes irrespective of capacity or need. What is affirmed is that existing inequalities outrage the dignity of men—rich and poor alike—and automatically reduce some to being treated as means and others as ends, obscuring their common humanity by emphasizing the external accidents of birth, wealth, or social position. These disparities which are often connected with different functions in society give rise to economic classes; and modern social activity is characterized by the warfare between these classes. The class war is not an evil inven-

tion of "the Reds". It is a consequence of this toleration of gross economic inequalities. One aspect of this criticism to which attention is especially called is the way in which it affects the rising generation. Even in a wealthy country like England large numbers of children undergo grave injury to their health before they reach the age of school attendance, even though the methods whereby this could be prevented are well enough known. The educational provisions in schools are often defective. Classes are still overcrowded, buildings unsuitable to educational purposes, and equipment poor, owing to parsimony in public expenditure. The school-leaving age has not been raised unambiguously to fifteen because of the demand in industry for child labour, much of it blind-alley. Secondary schools are still graded on a social class basis and are only open to a select few. The proportion of the population between the ages of twelve and sixteen which is receiving secondary education in grant aided schools is about 11%, and between sixteen and seventeen years of age it is only 7%. This is the lot of the "lower classes", whereas, independent of ability or capacity to serve society, wealth and social status procures access to the good things of life—health, continued education, and sound education. The chance of a non-elementary schoolboy proceeding to an

ancient University is 110 times that of an elementary schoolboy reaching the same goal. Such conditions and such disparities are morally indefensible—and politically remediable.

A third point at which the economic order is criticized in the Oxford Report is that it is difficult to reconcile the demand that Christians should obey God in their daily work, and the kinds of work which they are called upon to do. Some workers must produce shoddy or destructive goods, others must develop that deception which so frequently accompanies salesmanship, and in these activities, necessary as they seem to be in order to earn a living, it is impossible to experience a sense of vocation. Militating even more against a sense of vocation are two features of modern society—unemployment, and blind-alley occupations. Unemployment produces insecurity throughout industry and society, and is the single most serious threat to society's continuance in its present form. When prolonged, unemployment creates a sense of social uselessness in the unemployed, emptying their lives of meaning, threatening both them and their employed colleagues with the annihilation of point or purpose in life. The young worker entering industry at fourteen or fifteen years of age can feel no sense of vocation in his job if he knows that at eighteen or twenty-

one he must leave and be unemployed. The increasing tendency of industry to run on juvenile and unskilled labour and to be devoid, therefore, both of permanent opportunities of service and of hopes of promotion, renders much juvenile employment and all juvenile prospects depressing and hopeless in the extreme, and the phrase a "sense of vocation" meaningless.

The conference also noted the movement towards trustification and centralization in industry, referred to earlier in this chapter. Criticism was directed towards the irresponsibility entailed by the possession of the vast powers which this centralization bestowed upon those at the head of modern industrial concerns. By irresponsibility was meant not that Boards of Directors wantonly misused their powers, but that the fact that they possessed such enormous power, in the exercise of which they are responsible to none except themselves, is in itself irresponsible organization. They are not accountable to any superior authority representing the community. Such autocracy produces both in individuals and in society a character and an outlook impossible to reconcile with any relationship which can be accepted by the Christian. The very exercise of such power creates a dictatorial temper in those who wield it, and a servility in those who endure it which prevents the

development and growth of anything approaching a true community. Force rather than justice rules in such a world—quite independently of the moral qualities of those who exercise this power. To render industrial higher control and financial authority sensitive to, and controllable, by some authority representing the community is, as we have seen, one of the most important social necessities of our age. It is upon this that the achievement of any substantial remedy for the three evils previously noted depends, though the achievement of responsibility in industrial and financial control may be substantially served by activities directed towards the solution of problems arising from the first three criticisms of society tendered by the Oxford Conference.

It is clearly important for us to pass beyond the stage of generalized criticism, though in a world conference this was impossible. If acquisitiveness, inequalities, absence of a sense of vocation, and irresponsibility of economic power are the major criticisms which Christians level at modern social arrangements, then we must inform ourselves of the particular forms in which these features show themselves, and conduct our struggle against these particular manifestations. Acquisitiveness, for example, can be located in its particular forms and combated there. Inequalities can be tackled



through housing, health, and education programmes, and in campaigns for decent wages, hours, and conditions of employment, in raising the school-leaving age, in factory legislation, and especially by modifying the laws of inheritance. Similarly we can localize the other criticisms.

In thus locating our complaint we find others who, for many and varied reasons, have the same criticism and the same immediate objectives and remedies. We join with them in political parties and social movements, for only by so doing will it be possible to realize our common immediate objective. Christians and non-Christians alike join in these political formations and submit to their discipline so long as their immediate aims coincide. It is only by so doing that Christians live their life of obedience to God. It is in and through Trade Unions, Employers' Federations, Management Associations, and their counterparts in Party Politics—and only through these or kindred social organizations—that the judgements and criticisms of sincere Christians stand a chance of being made effective in social life. The Christian therefore finds himself of necessity actively engaged in politics in the service of God.

The argument of this chapter is that politics involves not merely the casting of votes in an election, but the much wider sphere of relations be-

tween different groups in society and the social and economic framework to which their interaction gives rise. Therefore a Christian, because he cannot extricate himself from society, is inextricably involved in political action whether he likes it or not. That being so, his action ought to be the result of conscious Christian thought rather than unconscious drifting. A great number of Christians have not realized this yet. Moreover, even those who have are not necessarily prepared to accept the criticisms of our social order made in the Oxford Conference Report, whilst amongst those who do accept these criticisms there are great differences of opinion as to how matters are to be remedied. It is important to find out why Christians differ, and how far their differences can be overcome.

### CHAPTER III .

## WHY CHRISTIANS DIFFER

THE quality of our Christian discipleship shows itself, as we have seen, in the decisions and choices we make in daily life. Some of them involve great issues, some are so trivial as to be almost a matter of habit; some are of an intimate and personal kind, some are related to public policy; but to a greater or lesser extent in all of them we obey or deny the claims of the Kingdom of God. Every choice made in relation to social and political affairs implies a view of what is or is not a desirable *policy* to be adopted. It is notorious that it is at this point that Christians are most divided and confused. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves what are the causes of this division, and how far it is inevitable. Our argument will be that there are three main reasons why Christians differ. These are: (i) differences in analysis of the factors involved in any situation and in estimates of the probable effects of different lines of policy; (ii) differences of time and circumstance; (iii) sinful elements which enter to a greater or lesser extent into all human judgements. It will be argued that there is no way

of overcoming divisions of opinion due to the first two causes, and that those arising from the third can be mitigated but not transcended. Other approaches to the problem of Christian living will be considered, after which we shall have to ask how far this lack of agreement between Christians should paralyse them in public life, and whether this means that Christianity is largely irrelevant, because in the last resort it can produce no clear answer to the political and social—and indeed personal—problems which are proving too intractable for twentieth-century man to solve.

## I

How does the Christian set about the task of living as a Christian in society? Our first chapter dealt with the good news of the Gospel in which he is grounded, and the second with the nature of the society in which he has to live. That Gospel is not to be thought of primarily as a system of ethical teaching expounded by Jesus, nor certain "ideals" or a certain "spirit" for which He stood, but as a disclosure of what God is like. It is not first of all concerned with the conduct which mankind should exhibit, but with the self-revelation of God in the life and death of Jesus Christ, and

His living power in the Christian Church in the world throughout the succeeding centuries. It is to the nature and will of God that the moral teaching of the New Testament bears witness, and in the perspective of which Christians have to act. Peace and power is promised only to those who try to do God's will, and that means, in the first place, viewing the world from the standpoint of His nature. Christianity is indeed a "radical" religion, for no Christian with any conception of the holy and just God of the Hebrew prophets and the holy and loving God seen in Jesus Christ, can be satisfied with the relations of men in society as he sees them in the world around him. If God is like that, then there is the continual call to achieve in the material arrangements of human life such treatment of men as He would wish for His children. Confronted with the social evils, the injustices and inequalities which he finds around him, no Christian can possibly be satisfied with things as they are. He must seek to improve them. His vision of God will continually spur him on to further efforts, and at the same time help him to see the inadequacy of what he has so far achieved. This vision can never be reduced to rules of behaviour, still less to immediate questions of public policy. It is rather the dynamic within which the whole of life is lived and evaluated.

Fortified by the command of God and the power of the Spirit, the Christian has to seek justice for all men in social life, and make his own personal choices with that end in view. Some of the features of our society which he will immediately call into question have already been indicated in the previous chapter, where it was seen that the Oxford Conference summarized them as (i) the enhancement of acquisitiveness, (ii) arbitrary inequalities of circumstance and opportunity, (iii) irresponsible possession of economic power, (iv) the frustration of a sense of Christian vocation. They are indeed obvious; yet the trouble has been that they have been taken for granted. Differences of treatment between children, for instance, which are based solely on the economic position of the parents, so that the majority are thrown into industry at the age of fifteen at the latest, whilst a privileged minority may stay at school and university until twenty-two, have been regarded as natural; so has the economic power which enables a privately owned industrial plant to be closed down, as at Merthyr Tydfil and Dowlais, leaving a human community derelict behind it, or to be opened up in a hitherto non-industrial area, like the Great West Road district of London, leaving others to solve the immense problems of community and social adjustments which it creates. The

extent to which Christians in the last four hundred years have ceased to think about social issues is indicated by their slowness to criticize these things. It *may* be argued, as we shall see, that they are inevitable. In that case we should have to make the best of them, as we do of the pains of childbirth; but if so we should at least not view them with indifference and complacency.

However, the upheaval through which Western Europe is passing, the break-up of well-known patterns of life which marks the end of an era, is waking Christians from their complacency. For they are the last people who ought to be complacent. When they look out upon the world in the perspective of their radical gospel, they are almost bound to admit that the four criticisms advanced by the Oxford Conference are valid. Even this, however, rests upon an analysis of our society, and it is conceivable that someone would deny that one, or any, of these four evil features are characteristic of it. We should conclude that his deductions from the evidence were very odd, but it would not be possible to deny him the name of Christian. Already we have moved away from the central facts of the Gospel, even in indicating evils to which Christians should direct their attention. But to recognize an evil is much more simple than to find the appropriate remedy, and it is when

we come to direct practical proposals that Christian opinion is most seriously divided; indeed, all the divisions of opinion as to current policy to be found outside the Church are also to be found within it. This is because a policy put forward to alleviate evils demands a much closer examination of those evils than a mere diagnosis of their presence, and requires a forecast of the probable effects of different lines of policy. Only as the result of such an analysis and forecast can any proposal be advanced or supported. The analysis may be precise and scientific, if the evidence can be handled that way, which is not always the case in social affairs, or it may be of a rough and ready kind, as it is usually bound to be with busy people in civil life, but it *is* an analysis. And the only rational grounds we can give for supporting any proposal or programme, however little we have thought about it, is either that in our opinion it will remedy certain abuses more effectively than others, or that it is the least of several evils.

Now it is clear that there is no special short-cut for Christians to arrive at their opinion, nor is there any guarantee that all Christians will come to the same conclusion as to what should be done. Sometimes there may be a striking majority opinion among Christians, as there came to be about the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth



century; sometimes it may be deeply divided, as it is at present about pacifism or socialism, even though there may be general agreement about the ills to be cured. But since in all judgements an element of analysis and forecast enters which is not based directly on the Christian faith but on evidence of the actual "secular" world, it is misleading to label any judgement or any programme based on it "Christian". There can be no certainty in this finite world, and Christians, like other men, are bound to differ about immediate policies.

Perhaps the most obvious illustration is the question of Social Credit. This is the name given to a series of monetary proposals put forward by Major C. H. Douglas as the remedy for the poverty and unemployment which is rife to-day. These proposals are certainly attractive, and if they are correct the way out of our difficulties is simple. For this reason they are taken up by some Christians with great fervour as the "Christian" solution to the social problem. In Social Credit writings there is a good deal of social and political philosophizing, but closer examination reveals that it is all based on the assumption that there are immense productive resources unused by our economic system. This assumption that we live in an age of potential "plenty" is in turn derived

from an analysis by Major Douglas of the circulation of money in the monetary system, an analysis which is dismissed as incorrect by economists, whose business it is to study the monetary system. On the one hand, therefore, there is Major Douglas, an engineer, and other engineers, doctors, accountants, poets, and a body of followers, and on the other, economists who, however much they may disagree on some immediate matters of policy, are all agreed in holding Major Douglas's theory to be erroneous. He *may*, of course, be right, but how absurd it is of Christians to think that Christianity is involved one way or the other! Christians, like others, can only decide which of the two parties is the more likely to be right on general grounds, unless they have time to master recent monetary theory as well as that of Major Douglas.

The same principles hold good in relation to the general problem of politics. Christians who agree on the existence of the four evils already specified, may find themselves in different parties because of genuine differences of opinion as to the means whereby they are to be remedied. We need to scrutinize party loyalties closely, since they are often the result of inherited prejudice or economic interest, but even without these extraneous elements in our judgements, Christians are likely to disagree about immediate programmes. Consider,

for instance, the controversy whether these evils of modern capitalism can be abolished by gradual reform or whether a new social system is needed. When every allowance for prejudice and vested interest is made, the question is at bottom a technical one. It presupposes a knowledge of the way capitalism has worked in the past and what are its tendencies in the present. On the basis of such an analysis it is possible to examine how far the suggested reforms would in fact remedy abuses without destroying the few remaining merits of the system and making it altogether unworkable: equally important, it is possible to examine what is likely to happen if we go on drifting as we are doing at the moment. Socialism is the most coherent alternative which is presented to us to-day. The "Socialism *versus* Capitalism" controversy is therefore one about economic systems. Socialism is concerned with the problem of the control of economic life in a highly complex and interlocked society like our own; that is, with the problem of economic power, in whose interests it is wielded, and what check there is upon its abuse. It is particularly related to the dilemmas of large scale monopoly capitalism. All this involves a complex political and social analysis, on which opinions may legitimately differ. Christianity is not directly involved. True, some socialists make

a religion out of their belief; that is because they need a faith and find a substitute for Christianity in a new order of society. Christians should not be misled into placing a temporal system of social organization, however noble its conception, on the same plane as the Gospel. Christians can only come to a decision on general grounds about this, as about other questions. With their radical gospel to give them their perspective, they have to check their own motives and those of others, decide which policy would make for more just arrangements between man and man, and estimate the price which such a policy demands. Having come to a decision between the alternatives offered, they have to use their influence accordingly through political channels. This balancing of probabilities is the task of Christians in every aspect of life, not only in big decisions like this one, which everyone has to face, but those in our daily work which are often impossible to forecast. The element of rational calculation enters in every case.

Many Christians do not accept this position. They would hold that a "Christian" judgement is possible without the necessity of analysing the different alternatives which the actual state of society offers, and the probable effects which the choice of each of them would involve. There is,

for instance, a good deal of talk in sermons and in Christian circles generally about "the Christian solution" to different evils of the contemporary world, or of the necessity of "applying the principles of Christ to every sphere of life". Whatever issue is particularly in view, whether it is the personal relations of men and women, family or social life, national or international affairs, the assumption is implied that there is some way of dealing with the question, some programme of action which, if only Christians would think harder and more clearly, or be better people, they would all agree upon. Such an action or programme is therefore called "Christian". But the more such statements are examined the more unsatisfactory and tenuous they appear. When pressed for a detailed instance of a "Christian" solution or a specific application of a "Christian principle", the reply usually takes one of two forms. The first comes down to the assertion that if everyone was a Christian and lived the Christian life there would be no problem. This has tended to be the answer of evangelical Protestantism, for which the decisions of the pious and converted man, exercising his individual responsibility and judgement, are the answer of Christianity to the dilemmas of the world. When everyone is converted all problems will be solved.

Similarly, the Oxford Group Movement with its trust in the guidance of the "changed" man, finds the Christian answer to modern problems in the God-controlled actions of individuals, and works at great pressure to "change" enough individuals to stop the calamity which is threatening Western Europe. The second reply is to seize upon some particular proposal whether a medieval device like the "just price" or the forbidding of usury, or a modern one like Social Credit or the Soviet System or the Corporative State, and claim that it is the "Christian" way of dealing with the situation.

The argument of the previous two chapters has shown how unsatisfactory are both these replies. The first side-steps the whole issue. The life of a Christian as we have seen is one of daily response in his work and leisure to the claims of the Kingdom of God, a response which can show itself only in relation to the hundred and one decisions which have to be taken, most of which cannot be foreseen in advance. An assertion that if all were Christians there would be no problem is of little use to a factory manager who has to balance the changes required by the introduction of a new process against the claims of the human personalities of the employees, the effects on the industry as a whole, and the interests of consumers. Such

an approach assumes, moreover, that all the problems of life and society can be reduced to those of the individuals who compose it; it has no conception of the social process or of the framework of social relationships in which our lives are set. It has, too, an unwarranted faith in the ability of the Christian to achieve perfect obedience to the will of God in his decisions or as the result of his guidance. Nor does the second reply resolve the dilemma. When each of these "Christian" solutions is examined it turns out to be a technical proposal depending upon an examination of how society works which has nothing directly to do with the Christian faith, and for which Christians as such, merely because they are Christians, have no special aptitude.

It is also pertinent to ask what are the "principles" which we are urged to apply? Some Christian thinkers have tried to work out the blue-prints of a "Christian" society. These all suffer from a fatal defect. Either they make an attempt to modify what are taken to be the worst features of the present system (capitalism) without altering any of its basic presuppositions, or else they are quite out of relation to the situation in which we find ourselves to-day and are not, therefore, relevant to the specific decisions which we are called upon to make. Usually in the latter case they hark

back to the Middle Ages, which is supposed to have been "Christian" in a way that capitalism is not. In both cases they are historically conditioned. To muddle them up with the eternal truths of the Christian Gospel leads to nothing but confusion. Indeed, the attempt to deduce social systems from the Christian faith is bound to lead to failure; it is not by that method that we can bridge the gulf between the Christian faith and the common life that the Renaissance and the Reformation created. In the Middle Ages an attempt was rightly made to hold the whole of life in one focus; that focus was theology, "the Queen of the Sciences". The synthesis, however, was on a wrong basis and inevitably broke up. One group of thinkers, the theologians, were claiming the right to decide what other groups should believe, in the case of the natural scientists, or how they should run their businesses, in the case of the merchants. The story of how natural science and economic life had to free themselves from theological bondage is a familiar one. The social sciences, which developed later, inherited this freedom. To-day life has been revolutionized by scientific method and the expansion of capitalism. To what extent the results are good or bad is a matter of divergent opinions, but it is clear to all that knowledge instead of being set in a coherent framework is



disintegrated into divorced specialisms. However, in the attempt to unify them into an adequate world view, for which Christianity alone can suffice, nothing is gained by an attempt to make theology short-circuit the work of the social sciences, and proclaim from above what a "Christian" social order shall be. The social sciences, like the natural sciences, must be granted their freedom. Knowledge can only be unified by Christians by the recognition that the material provided by the different branches of knowledge forms an indispensable element in the formation of Christian judgements. The autonomy of these branches of knowledge should therefore be welcomed; so should their progress, as providing material essential to the exercise of moral responsibility by Christians. Only with their aid is it possible to know what are the movements and tendencies within society in relation to which the Christian has to choose. Just as there is no "Christian" mathematics or chemistry, so there can be no "Christian" economics or sociology, only chemists, economists, and sociologists who are also Christians. When this is recognized, we can proceed to the task, as yet hardly begun, of bringing unity with freedom into the intellectual world, by relating specialized knowledge in a new and living way to theology.

If those who talk about applying "Christian principles" have not in mind any particular blueprint of a social order, they can only mean certain very general statements about the value of human personality or the necessity of justice between man and man. Each of these springs directly from the Christian faith, but their implications are so far-reaching that we only realize them spasmodically in our personal lives, still less in the complexities of a social system. They are the ultimate beliefs against which all particular achievements are to be measured and by which they are judged. There is no means of deciding the application of them at any time without bringing in the "secular" knowledge derived in the last resort from the social sciences. There are, in fact, no Christian principles which can be applied, to use a phrase of Canon Leonard Hodgson's, "like sticking-plaster".<sup>1</sup>

We are back then at the position reached at the end of the last chapter. The only basis of Christian decision and Christian action in society, or in any sphere, is the perspective of the Christian faith on the one hand, and a knowledge of the facts and possibilities of a situation on the other.

<sup>1</sup> See his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford, which was printed in *Theology*, August 1938.

About the latter, knowledge and opinion will differ.

## II

Christians also differ about practical policies because of differences in time and in circumstance. All choices which a Christian makes are relevant to and arise out of specific situations with which he himself is faced. Naturally the experience of other Christians is a guide, and a wise Christian will seek all the help he can from those who have thought most deeply about the issues which worry him. The choice, however, is in the last resort his own, in relation to his own peculiar circumstances. It follows from this that while the experience of past generations of Christians is often illuminating, it does not furnish a norm for the present. The same is true of that of contemporary Christians in very diverse circumstances. Christians in twentieth-century Britain, like those of first-century or fifteenth-century Europe or twentieth-century Japan, have to obey the claims of the Kingdom of God in the whole of their lives, bringing to bear the searchlight of a challenging religion on their own personal and social situation, but with no fixed plan at which to aim, no code of ethical rules to be applied.

All the ethical decisions of the New Testament, for instance, are to be taken in their context; they arose out of the situation of the early Church as a tiny minority in an immense Roman Empire. Its members were children of their time. Slavery as an institution was then not an ethical issue for St. Paul. Nor could it be through the feudal ages; it did not become so until the development of modern capitalism in the nineteenth century required a mobile labour force. What St. Paul thought about slavery is thus not a binding rule for the modern Christian. Yet we can learn from the depth of religious conviction he showed in dealing with the run-away slave Philemon and his owner, how it is possible for individual Christians to transcend any social system.

Similarly, the medieval system of usury laws has no validity to-day. It too was the child of its time. In its conception it may have admirably answered the needs of a society which had little need for capital accumulation, but it was quickly outgrown by the development of merchant capitalism. Christians at that time made the mistake of clinging to inadequate rules which had outlived their appropriateness, instead of applying new insights to a new situation. Having wasted energy for nearly two centuries on the wrong issues, they found themselves at the end of it left

far behind and have not yet succeeded in catching up. Indeed, putting the best face on it, they complacently implied that there was no catching up to be done.

In our own day, therefore, the social policies advocated by Christians will differ from those of previous centuries, and will differ in different parts of the earth. It is quite possible for a Christian to be a Fascist or a Communist, though not, of course, in the sense that he can admit that race, blood, soil or class is the ultimate bond between men. This is the cause of the conflict between Christianity and modern totalitarian movements. A Christian's ultimate loyalty is to God alone, and he can accept no nation, nor leader of a nation, as *inevitably* the mouth-piece of God. In that sense it is very difficult for a Christian to be a satisfactory member of a totalitarian state, as the German Confessional Church has found. Nevertheless, a Christian may quite conceivably decide that a Fascist or Communist *policy* is the best at any given time for a specific situation, and support it. This was the view taken of the National Socialist policy by most of the Christians in Germany in the early 1930's. Most of the Confessional Church leaders, now bearing such a magnificent witness, are politically National Socialists. We may perhaps feel they were wrong in thinking

that National Socialism was the best remedy for Germany's deplorable condition, but it was their decision, not ours, to make. We may learn from their experience, but it provides no standard for us.

Toyohiko Kagawa is doing magnificent work in Japan trying to transform society through the spread of co-operative societies. Since it is the one non-totalitarian social experiment which stands some chance of being allowed to continue in a totalitarian country like Japan, it is clearly a very wise and courageous task for a Christian to undertake. But the attempt to generalize about it, as Kagawa himself tries to do, is a mistake. An analysis of what co-operatives can and cannot do in different situations throws grave doubts on their ability unaided to transform Western industrial society, or that of Japan for that matter. It is therefore pointless to regard them as peculiarly "Christian", even though they may be the best thing for Christians to build up in contemporary Japan. Co-operative societies are no more and no less "Christian" than other social organizations in which Christians can participate to achieve specific purposes in relation to specific situations.

Christian judgements are always relative to their time and place and because of that, as well as because of varying knowledge and opinions, Chris-

tians will differ on immediate practical issues. Nor can these differences be resolved.

### III

We come now to the third reason for divisions of opinion among Christians. It can be summed up in one word—sin. By this is meant the distortions, conscious and unconscious, which pervert our judgements, and which are due to pride, selfishness, lack of imagination, fear, jealousy, prejudice, and refusal to face unpleasant facts. When we stop to analyse our own behaviour we are immediately conscious of these faults within ourselves. No one who joins in common worship in the General Confession “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done” can fail to realize how far his conduct has been governed by all these unworthy considerations. He is driven to say with the Prodigal Son, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”<sup>1</sup> The root cause is selfishness, our tendency to look out upon life from the viewpoint of our fears, hopes and ambitions, to make ourselves the centre of the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xv. 18-19.

picture, in fact to make ourselves God. From this spring the subsidiary sins such as pride and fear. We are all familiar with the way in which we find high sounding moral reasons for actions which are dictated by much less estimable motives. The word "rationalization" has become popular. Psychologically it means the process by which individuals find logical reasons for actions and opinions which are really dictated by instinct or other unconscious motive. But it has also come to have a moral as well as a scientific connotation and in popular speech to indicate a process which is only half unconscious and which, indeed, in the Christian view is deliberately sinful. Christians, in short, are the last people in the world who should take their own immediate judgements and dispositions at their face value. How is it possible to read the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount without realizing that by every syllable we are judged? We do not love our intimate relations, our wives and children as ourselves, except in occasional transient moments, let alone our neighbour. This does not mean that we are all completely darkened wretches, nor that we are equally sinful all the time; it means that we are usually a queer mixture of good and bad, capable of great things in the power of the Spirit, but at the same time liable to fall away grievously into



selfishness and subtle self-deception. Christianity therefore always has a relevant word to say to us all the days of our life, for as we never reach perfection in this life, so we always need to have our pretences shown up in the searchlight of the Gospel.

If our judgements are warped in our personal affairs, the same is true of our judgements and opinions about social and political questions, and this is the point that particularly concerns us here. Yet Christians have been surprisingly slow to be as critical of themselves in public affairs as they have been in more immediate personal matters. They have regarded their opinions on the former questions as honest and unbiased with astonishing *naïveté*, when they have only too often been due to inherited prejudice and, even more powerful, current material interests. This is a theme on which a whole book could well be written, and it is a fundamental point to grasp. It is only possible here to urge Christians to think very carefully how far their opinions on current affairs are influenced by social factors which seriously hamper accurate and honest thinking. Once this is seen much of the misunderstandings between Christians will be removed and, perhaps, even a good deal of the bitterness in public life.

From Chapter II we can see that the different groups of people whose conflicts of interest give

rise to the conflicting social and political programmes of our day, can be divided most usefully into those whose intention is broadly to maintain the existing division of social and economic power, and those who wish to change that distribution. Here lies one of the key choices for every Christian. There is no escape from the choice, and all Christians are not likely to make the same one. Yet the question must be asked, Why do so many Christians show such an affection for the existing state of affairs? Chiefly because the strength of the Church lies relatively in the middle-class professional and commercial sections of the nation. Even in a denomination like Methodism, which has a considerable percentage of industrial workers, the leadership, especially the regional and national leadership, is still predominantly middle class. The reason for this lies in the social and ecclesiastical history of the last four hundred years. On the whole these sections do not experience the acuteness of the insecurity and inequalities which beset the industrial worker. It is easier for them to take an optimistic view of social life, to believe that their reasonably comfortable position is the reward of their merits, and to look to steady progress in the future, in which any legitimate grievance of the workers will be remedied by consultation and the recognition of

common interests. This is shown in their attitude to strikes and to "blacklegs". They are pained when a Union strikes against non-Union labour; it is an infringement of personal rights to compel a man to join a Union. The courage of "blacklegs" is admired. Yet to the Union man who sees that his only bargaining weapon is the collective strength of the workers, and that non-Union men are both getting conditions of employment which would not have been achieved without a Union, and at the same time weakening its strength by not joining, a strike is bound to appear in a different light.

Such Christians tend to ignore the basic evils of the social system to which reference has already been made and to single out, as questions peculiarly suitable for Christian witness, temperance, gambling, Sunday trading, and Sunday cinemas. These things, however important in themselves, leave all the key problems of society out of account altogether.

In short, it is only too easy to find moral reasons for supporting either a state of affairs which suits us materially, or programmes and plans for reform which are not likely to affect us because they deal with habits for which we have no liking. Much of this is unconscious; an acceptance of habits of life and thought in which we have grown up and

which we have never questioned, but that does not excuse it. Nor is such self-deception confined to the upper and middle classes; it is very easy for the industrial worker to identify his interests with those of the whole community. But it is the mental habits of those supporting the existing state of affairs which are our particular concern, because the Churches so often reflect them. Indeed, the leaders of the different denominations are by education and social status inclined to accept the present arrangements, though doubtless anxious to see reforms here and there, not because they have critically analysed the situation, but because they have uncritically taken over certain social assumptions and habits of thought.

The use of the term "ideology" is becoming very common in this connection to denote a system of political and social ideas. But the word is used very loosely, often to mean any body of ideas which the person who uses it happens to dislike. Some people have even talked about "the Christian ideology". It is important to use the word precisely, and Professor Karl Mannheim in his book *Ideology and Utopia* (Kegan Paul, 1936) has restricted it very usefully to indicate the moral and political reasons which groups who at present hold political and economic power in a State find, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce their

position. The argument that in Britain the ablest people do "find their way to the top" and therefore that in spite of certain inequalities (whose existence is admitted with a show of fairness) power is in the hands of those best qualified to exercise it, is ideological. Similarly ideological thinking enabled many people to answer the case for greater economic equalities between man and man, by proving that the equal division of all incomes in excess of £2,500 a year would not add 5/- a week to each family with less. As if anyone had ever suggested such a fatuous method of redistributing the national income! It is only too easy to allow bias derived from one's social group to lead one into a dishonest selection and use of technical evidence.

Christians are no more free than other men from class perspectives, and from the habit of clouding social issues in catchwords. Indeed, they find it even more easy in some respects, for they can evade the real issues of power and inequality in society, about which a choice has to be made, by taking refuge in moral phrases. On the other hand the Christian has the potentiality of great balance and soberness of judgement. The more he allows himself to grow in the knowledge and love of God, the more he will bring his judgements and opinions and actions to the scrutiny of the

Gospel. He will be saved from the ideological fancies of those in whose interest it is that things should remain as they are, and will be led to work for the remedying of abuses even if it means sacrifice of privilege and comfort on his part. He will also be saved from the illusions of those who expect that changes in the social system will by themselves produce harmony and righteousness, illusions characteristic of many Socialists and practically all Communists. But this will not make him cynical on the one hand, or moralistic on the other. The fact that no immediate policy can lead to a perfect society will not prevent him realizing that things have to be done, choices made, here and now. But his Christian insight will never allow him to be complacent about what is done, since he knows that man always corrupts in some measure whatever he undertakes. This insight will equally prevent him from expecting to sit back and "be a Christian" without being involved in the humdrum and complicated task of setting things to rights; there is no short cut to perfection in a situation which is the product of thousands of years of human muddle, of good and bad, working out their consequences. He will echo the words of W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from Iceland*. Faber & Faber.

And to the good, who knows how wide the gulf,  
 how deep  
 Between Ideal and Real, who being good have felt  
 The final temptation to withdraw, sit down and weep,

We pray the power to take upon themselves the guilt  
 Of human action, though still as ready to confess  
 The imperfection of what can and must be built,  
 The will and power to act, forgive and bless.

Above all, realizing how easy self-deception and ideological thinking is, and how we never completely transcend our own concerns and look at life as God looks at it, Christians will be anxious to achieve a common mind, not only about the social evils to be remedied but about the steps required to remedy them; they will try to reduce, as far as possible, differences of opinion due to differences of perspective; but in so far as this will never be completely possible they will recognize that they and those who differ from them are alike sinners in the sight of God, and it is impossible to claim that they are quite certainly taking the "Christian" position.

IV

We have argued that in every judgement by a Christian, every choice made in obedience to the

reign of God, whether in personal or social affairs, there enters an element of rational calculation of the consequences of different lines of action. This calculation is not derived directly from the Christian faith, but includes an analysis, whether that of unaided common sense or after careful investigation, of the factors involved in any issue. Consequently the adjective "Christian" cannot be applied to any of the conclusions reached, but only to the men or women who reach them. Christians will differ in their analyses and forecasts, partly owing to genuinely technical differences of opinion, partly to differences in time and circumstance, and partly to sinful elements distorting judgements.

It will be useful to turn once more to other views of the basis of action by Christians and to see briefly how they avoid this position. We may divide them up into "orthodox" and "liberal" views. By orthodox is meant those theological positions which have emphasized man's sinfulness and the fallen character of this world. The more Catholic type of orthodox thought has so distrusted the judgement of sinful man that it has wanted the Church to decide for him. For some the Church is itself the Kingdom of God, and those who favour its material interests as an institution are fulfilling God's will; those who do not are His enemies. That is, in the main, the position of the Roman Catholic



Church, as in Spain. There is no guarantee in the Christian Faith, however, that the material interests of the institutional Church are identical with the will of God. Indeed it is much more difficult for a slow-moving institution like the Church, with a long history and great vested interests, economic and intellectual, to achieve righteousness than it is for an individual. Even where this identification is not made, it is still assumed that rules of behaviour and a scheme of social organization can be derived directly from the Christian Faith and taught to men by the Church. We have seen how unsatisfactory this is.

The more Protestant type of "orthodox" thought is very conscious of the sin and unworthiness of man; he can do no good of himself; he can only accept humbly the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ, and listen all the moments of his life to what the Word of God tells him. In practice this type of Protestant regards all human schemes and achievements as so evil that the Word of God judges them all indiscriminately. Yet, at the same time he is so conscious that, if left to itself, humanity would relapse into anarchy and destroy itself, that he accepts all the arrangements of social and political life that he finds about him with gratitude, as the safeguard against chaos. This leads to the sheerest kind of reaction. It can only be regarded

as theologically erroneous, because it sets too great a gulf between God and His creation, and at the same time most inconsistently sanctifies the existing social order. Many of those, however, who have been influenced by such Protestant thought (which is found particularly on the Continent) would go no further than to emphasize the difference laboured in this book between all human judgements and achievements and the will of God. Yet even they do not explain *how* to translate this radical, searching, dynamic Gospel, this obedience to the word of God, into specific day-to-day decisions and choices. It can only be done by the rational calculation to which we have referred.

By "liberal" views is meant the more optimistic outlook, which regards humanity as imperfect certainly, yet gradually conquering its limitations and improving its intellectual and moral stature, so that eventually God's Kingdom will be established upon earth. This has been more characteristic of recent Anglo-Saxon Christianity. It has found no difficulty in trusting the individual's judgement or his capacity perfectly to fulfil the will of God. Its most optimistic sections have assumed that the ordinary, decent Christian will carry on his life like other ordinary, decent mortals, and that both alike are obeying the

Christian ethic or the golden rule, or whatever it is called. Christianity is reduced to Rotarianism, and the problem of Christian ethics hardly exists. Another type of theological liberalism is found in those who are far from optimistic about the present social system, but expect the fulfilment of their hopes in the change to a Socialist system. Like many Catholics, they link certain social arrangements closely with the Christian Faith, only for them Socialism is the social system required by Christianity. As we have seen, the same objection lies against them; they ignore the relative and conditioned character of all the choices which a Christian has to make.

But there are many liberals who take a somewhat different line. They are often quite critical of the existing order, but find the basis of Christian life in the immediate guidance of God irrespective of any calculation of consequences. The Oxford Group has already been mentioned. Many others, however, adopt the same position. They argue that capital punishment, for instance, is wrong in itself, as is, of course, the bombing of children. They are just "unchristian"; there can be no further argument about it. Religious pacifists are the outstanding example, and in one religious denomination, the Society of Friends, acceptance of Christianity has practically come to in-

volve the taking of a pacifist position. Some of the very finest Christians feel this very strongly, and have suffered for it in the past and will do so in the future. • It can be a far from safe and comfortable course to take. Yet it must be argued that it is a misinterpretation of the Gospel to suppose that any line of conduct can be equated with the great acts which God Himself wrought in history through Jesus Christ, or that God's will can be perfectly accomplished by it. The Christian's task is, in a sense, more difficult and less clear cut; it is to try to find what in an evil situation will do most to heal matters and create the least fresh evils in the process. He can have no certainty that he has found God's will, and can only follow what conclusion he has arrived at, and leave the rest in God's hands.

Once more we are back at the necessity of rational calculation in the Christian life. Pacifism is, perhaps, the test question for most people. It is quite permissible to argue with Bertrand Russell, that offensive weapons have so outstripped defensive ones since the Great War, and another war would mean so much damage, that even victory would achieve no valuable end. In that case there is no point in fighting, and pacifism is the best policy for Christians. But this depends on a technical judgement. Other Christians may agree with

Professor J. B. S. Haldane and many other authorities that the defensive weapons are not so inadequate, and therefore that it is possible to gain something or prevent something by a war. Christians may, in that case, think that there are conceivable circumstances in which more evil would be done by letting brutality have its way, than the suffering entailed by fighting to stop it. Neither body of Christians can declare that the other is "unchristian". But it is another thing to say that the Gospel *demand*s pacifism, and that those who are not pacifists fall grievously short in their Christian duty, because it is the true and inevitable conclusion to be drawn from Christ's teaching. Our whole argument has been designed to show that to deduce certain lines of conduct direct from the New Testament is to misuse it and to misunderstand the Gospel. No question of Christian conduct can be decided without a calculation of the consequences of different lines of action, and a decision taken prayerfully between them. It is just where this calculation comes in, that factors are introduced which are not directly related to the Christian Faith and about which Christians cannot necessarily expect to agree. Pacifism is the most acute and agonizing of the questions facing Christians to-day, but the principle is the same in all. There is no easy or tidy way out for Christians

in this tangled world. There is *no* policy on which they are all bound to agree.

Should this uncertainty paralyse Christians? Far from it. It is a poor faith that requires complete certainty that what it has decided is right before it can act. Such a certainty it will never get in this world. A Christian's task is to seek and to do God's will in God's world in the power of the Spirit. Having honestly tried to come to a decision and to remove those things in himself which hinder his coming to an honest decision, a Christian must then act on what he does see, having trust in God, both to use his imperfect service to build better than he knows, and also to show him, if he is ever alert to learn, wherein he has fallen short. The God whose justice is shown in His condemnation of sin is also the God whose love forgives the penitent and humble sinner, and whose power nerves him for fresh efforts of obedience to the Kingdom.

He will find himself often in opposition to other Christians who, as far as he knows, are as genuine as he is. Sometimes there will be a determined struggle between them. That will not deter him. Careful not to identify the opinions to which he has come with the truth of the Faith, he is bound to admit that he may be wrong. But he will con-

tinue on his course until he has been convinced that he is wrong. Boldness to act on what he has arrived at and at the same time readiness to admit the inadequacy of his obedience, is the hallmark of a Christian. In one breath he joins with multitudes of Christians all down the ages in a cry of triumph, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me",<sup>1</sup> and in the next he acknowledges that, even in his best efforts, he has to say with them, "we are unprofitable servants".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvii. 10.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIANITY

THOSE who are contented with the state of the world and are complacent about the British social system will not, perhaps, be inclined to question the necessity of Christianity. Whether they would call themselves "Christian" or not, it is part of a cultural environment of which they approve and that is all there is to be said. Happily complacency is becoming more and more difficult to maintain as the 1930's draw to their close; it has suffered many hard knocks and is on the defensive. Christians have a great opportunity to prevent defence from becoming plain reaction.

Roused from complacency many Christians have been seeking guidance from their faith, to see whether it can point to some way out of the impasse of internecine strife and social brutality. Many, also, who would scarcely call themselves Christians, are looking for a "lead" from the Churches. It is a shock to all of them to be told that there is no "Christian" solution of war, unemployment, economic injustice, or whatever is under discussion at the moment; that when the



rival merits of different monetary policies, for instance, are under discussion, there are no means by which Christian leaders can enter the field with a scheme of their own having the authority of the New Testament behind it. It is disconcerting to learn that there is no such thing as a "pure" Christian judgement in relation to any issue of practical life, which does not bring in calculations based on evidence about which opinions can differ. Even democracy cannot necessarily be a rallying ground for Christian opinion, though in the British situation it is to be expected that most Christians would choose to help preserve it. For in so far as by democracy is meant the claim of every man to equal consideration, a Christian is bound to assent; every man is to him the child of God. This is a principle of criticism by which to evaluate all social and political systems; since it is not perfectly achieved in any. But when the word democracy is used to indicate a particular type of representative government, it is clear that it is only one of different systems of government more or less adequate according to the particular circumstances in which it exists. A Christian might feel in some particularly chaotic times that authoritarian government is the best immediate system without necessarily being false to his Christian insight. Christianity, then, will not

come to an end if political democracy is wiped out, nor will it be completely realized if Britain has the courage to preserve democracy by extending it from political into economic life, a step which seems to many Christians, as to many others, the urgent necessity of the day. Christianity is more than any political or economic system.

There are, then, no "Christian" solutions in the sense in which the term is used in debating current policies. It is not surprising, therefore, that those whose enthusiasm is stirred by the needs of the hour should turn in disappointment from a religion which gives them no more specific lead than this. Why, they not unreasonably ask, should we be expected to pay much attention to Christianity? It does practically nothing to lessen differences of opinion on practical affairs. It throws all these vital questions back to the questioner to answer for himself. Surely it would be simpler not to complicate life by concerning oneself with religion, but to concentrate entirely on work within secular organizations, which at least get things done, and have a positive and intelligible aim? This feeling is fortified by the conviction that Christians are only too ready to use this lack of a Christian programme to shuffle out of any responsibilities for social life, beyond send-

ing cast-off clothes to the Special Areas, and to continue the even tenor of their comfortable ways, carrying on religious observances largely out of habit, in the same way that other people belong to social or recreational clubs. Contemporary Christianity does indeed provide plenty of evidence for such a view. Happily, however, that is not the whole story. It may be that in looking to Christianity and to the Church to provide the world with the solution of its immediate difficulties, they are asking the wrong questions, and, in disappointment at the answers, are missing the real contribution of Christianity to the social and political issues of our time. That contribution is none the less true because it is unexpected and to a certain extent unwelcome. It springs out of the basic doctrines of God and man. These doctrines penetrate more deeply into the fundamental problems of humanity than any others, and only on the basis of them can the position of Christians in society be seen in its true perspective. What are they?

## I

Christianity begins with the sovereignty of God, the creator and sustainer of all things, on Whom all life and all human achievements depend. The

Kingdom of God is not some perfect order of society which the efforts of men of goodwill can expect to establish on earth, but simply the reign of God here and now. It is not something we build but something we accept—or reject. The obverse of the sovereignty of God is the relativity and creatureliness of everything human. Mankind falls grievously short of the demands of God; confronted by Incarnate love, mankind rejected it and does reject it. Not only our personal intimate relations, but societies, institutions and group relationships come under God's holy judgement. Contemporary society, monopoly capitalism, comes under His judgement; but so also will future ones. There will never be a time when mankind can glory in perfect achievement. But just when our conscience compels us to admit the fact of our sinful state, God approaches us in the Incarnation of His Son. Jesus Christ lived and died at a certain period in history, and ever since then men have experienced His power in their lives, forgiving them their imperfect service of the past and enabling them to press onwards to fulfil God's will in God's world. Such good news cannot be a private possession, it must be lived out and expressed in individual lives and in political and social systems.

Christian doctrine is thus not mere theory, a

quixotic view of the meaning of life which may be interesting, if doubtful, but leaves all the problems of society untouched. Rather it goes to the root of the social situation.

First of all no sweeping condemnation or approval of any social system is possible. This is not to say that a Christian cannot distinguish any differences between them, but that they all share to a greater or lesser extent in the common sin of humanity. Consequently, whilst a Christian is discontented with capitalist plutocracy, he will not expect the perfect society to emerge out of the proletarian dictatorship in the U.S.S.R. All man-made philosophies replace God with some temporal loyalty and end by regarding their opponents as scarcely human. But Christians, who believe that they, together with those who differ from them, are alike human and sinful, and who also believe that beyond the tragedy of sin and the Cross is the yet more powerful God who brought Life out of Death, can never regard their enemies as enemies of God. However much we Christians oppose others, we are bound to be ready in humbleness to recognize that we may be mistaken in our convictions. We must believe that God has a place for those with whom we disagree. Nor can the man and woman whom God loves be summed up as a unit in the state or the

biological blood stream, or the class, or as a "hand" in industry, or a specimen for scientific study.

The Christian view of persons is consequently of fundamental importance in the political world. True, Christians who talk in exclusively personal terms, make nonsense of the political and social task of regulating group relationships; yet the ignoring of personal categories, which is only too easy in political life, deprives politics of all moral leadership and hands man over to the worst of tyrants, those who would do him good. It is easy to run away from personal thinking in politics because it is easy and tempting to run away from self. Experience of Christian worship can be one of the best safeguards against such self-deception.

Again, the Christian realizes that the ultimate destiny of man is beyond this world, which is best thought of as a training-ground in love and loyalty. Some Christians have been simple enough to deduce from this conviction that this world is merely a vale of tears, and whilst securing for themselves its comforts, have complacently accepted every injustice suffered by others. No condemnation can be too strong for such hypocrisy: "dope" is much too mild a word. If this world is a training-ground no one can succeed at the expense of others, and the charge is laid upon

the Christian to labour hard to remove hindrances and stumbling-blocks in the way of others. The Christian has, in fact, as we have said before, a "radical" religion. He is a revolutionary; he is critical of things as they are, and to remedy them he enters whole-heartedly into secular life. He is spurred on to do the will of the living, everlasting God. He is not an optimist. He does not expect to be able to achieve anything in this complex, technical work without soiling his hands. The fact that he is inextricably compromised in the evils of the world by the mere fact of his existence in society and the protection which he enjoys of the police, and in the last resort, of the military, will prevent him being squeamish in the pursuit of policies in which he believes. But he will not share the Utopian dreams of those who think that a mere change in social arrangements will enable the ultimate goodness of man to blossom. Critical of himself, he will be critical of all human efforts, bringing them to the test of the drastic law of the Kingdom of God, "Be ye perfect."<sup>1</sup> But if the Christian is not an optimist, neither is he a pessimist. He does not despair of the world and await deliverance from it into the next. He knows that God's Spirit working in man can achieve what humanly speaking would be impos-

<sup>1</sup> Matthew v. 48.

sible. He knows, too, that Jesus Christ has already broken the power of sin and death, and that righteousness is assured of victory. He does not know when, but he has the strength to endure and not give way to despair and cynicism. Indeed, pessimism and optimism are out of place; so are questions of the worthiness or unworthiness of man. The Christian life is not one of harsh rigour, grim and unyielding, nor is it one long series of efforts to summon up enough courage to perform acts of moral heroism; confidence or diffidence are beside the point, human boasting is set aside; it is one of serenity and freedom and joy, resting on the good news of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the doing of God's will in this world by the power of the Spirit.

This, then, is the real contribution of Christianity to the complex social issues. It does not lie at all in agreed programmes and policies. It is in this perspective that Christians have to come to their opinions by the process we described in the last chapter. Those who think that what matters most about a man is that he should make what they consider to be the right social and political decision, will be dissatisfied with the Christian position. But those who feel that what matters most is that man should be delivered from the fury of self-righteousness and the delusions of



self-deception, and sent out into the world with a true understanding of his nature and the meaning of his life, to work with a revolutionary zeal for the redress of abuses, will feel that within Christianity lies a depth of insight, a balance and soberness of judgement, which alone is capable of coping adequately with the human social and political situation. We shall see later the horrible results of the alternatives to the Christian world view.

The trouble, of course, is that Christians to a large extent do not produce the fruits of this Gospel for which so much has been claimed. Allowing for legitimate differences of opinion, they are far too lethargic and convention-ridden, accepting uncritically the prevailing standards of life and social outlook. The question of the shortcomings of Christians is focused in the wider one of the Church. For the basis of the Christian conviction and life we have been describing lies in common worship with other Christians; from it Christian witness springs. This common worship is the reason for the existence of the Church. We mean by the Church, in this instance, any group of Christians organized for worship and especially the organized denominational bodies. It has been created by the Christian Gospel and should be the focus of the unity of all Christians

in that Gospel. Yet nothing has caused more misunderstanding and called forth more abuse and more passionate defence than "the Church". It is important to get the issues clear.

## II

The essential point is quite simple. Considered as a social institution the Church is a very slow-moving and conservative one with many vested interests; its members considered one by one are an indifferent company, not particularly full of vice or virtue. However, because in its worship it directs them to God, not to itself, and the unity which holds it together is the unity of the Gospel, it is great in spite of itself; it cannot help transcending its weaknesses by the very message it proclaims; it utters God's own judgement upon itself. Because it alone points beyond itself, bringing all men to repentance before the judgement of God, it can hold together in this life in a unity of worship men who are divided on every other point. It is the Church's supreme contribution to the problem of man in society.

It is an indication of the failure of the empirical Churches and of the extent to which they obscure their own function, that this point is so little appreciated. We know that in the past doctrinal

and devotional differences have been the cause of disunity between Christians, and even of wars. And to-day, although the Church preserves a Gospel which has within itself the secret of unity, that unity is not sufficiently realized in practice. Nor does it seem to send many men and women with vision and energy into social life. Indeed some of the most sensitive minds of our day are so disgusted with the performance of the Churches and their leaders, that they do not see the real strength of the Christian Faith, and turn away from Christianity in their search for some integrating view of life. Even more, perhaps, merely find it meaningless, its activities and its jargon both equally remote from anything they have to deal with in daily life. Nothing must be allowed to hide the failure of the Churches, with all their resources of man-power and money, to rise above the assumptions of the present dominant classes, or to develop methods of helping their members to get to grips as Christians with the common life as they have to live it. If the Church is to present the radical message of the Gospel in live terms to men and women it must be more independent than it is at present. Some practical suggestions for reform will be found in the next chapter.

When all this is said, however, it remains true that men are looking for the wrong things from

the Church. If it announced its message more clearly it would not necessarily be more popular, the message is too challenging for that. For those who are to realize their bond of unity with other Christians before God, must first acknowledge their inadequacy and dependence on Him. Human pride finds that difficult. It is much less disturbing to ask the Church to lead a great crusade to achieve some reform. But that is not its primary task. Where the vast majority of Christians do agree on some specific subject, it is legitimate for organized Christianity to advocate it. Indeed, a more live Church would take more opportunity of getting abuses righted, as, for instance, the reduction of child labour in industry by the raising of the school-leaving age. In each case the minority of Church members who did not agree would remain within the fellowship, although dissentient on the particular point. But these are not the prime tasks of the Church. When every possible division between man and man is being raised in the world, the Church's task is to make ever more real the unity of all men in Christ. In such a time the refusal of some white Christians to receive the Sacrament from a native priest is simply blasphemous. The Church is committed to the assertion that the division between Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Aryan,

Negro and White has been abolished in the Cross of Jesus; so has that between bourgeois and labourer, pacifist and non-pacifist. Any attempt to make the acceptance of any current programme or policy, pacifism included, a condition of Church membership, obscures this crucial Christian witness in the midst of the group conflicts of our distracted world.

Driven by the pressure of external events the Christian Churches are coming to realize this unity more clearly. The whole Ecumenical Movement, referred to in the Introduction, is an indication of this. So is the history of the World's Student Christian Federation. There is no international body of students, on a secular basis, that can get representatives of every country to meet to-day, even for discussion. Recently the Italians withdrew from the *Confédération Internationale des Étudiants* on the ground that they had nothing in common with the students of democratic countries. Yet in the W.S.C.F. Conferences representatives of countries at war with one another can meet; not because they are politically and socially in agreement, far from it, but because they owe a loyalty ultimately to God alone, and can join in saying "We must obey God rather than men".<sup>1</sup> In similar fashion the American student Chris-

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 29.

tians can send a delegation of negroes to India, and the Chinese and Japanese can arrange a common day of intercession in the midst of hostilities. Every barrier raised by man against his fellows is broken down by God. Here is the heart of the message which the Church has to offer to man in society. In the less spectacular situation of Britain it is equally true that however dead and conventional the Churches are, however radically opposed one may be to their usual social opinions and actions, that is still no barrier to common worship, wherein all may be spiritually renewed, and all brought to question their too easy assumptions and habits.

Yet again it must be emphasized that because existing differences of class, status, education, and power are no barrier to common worship, the Church has no business to be content with transcending such differences only in worship. In so far as they are arbitrary and irresponsible she should be continually seeking to arouse in her members the zeal to get them removed.

The Church does not consist of good people; it consists of sinners who know that they are sinners and need to repent and be forgiven. Again that apparent weakness is its strength. A Church of people who imagined that they lived up to their creed would be rendered impotent by its very self-righteousness. Christianity is not a creed we live

up to. It is a judgement upon sin and a promise of forgiveness and power to repentant sinners. But if this is true of individual Christians, it is bound to be even more true of the Churches as institutions, for it is obvious, as we saw in Chapter II, that an institution is bound to be less flexible than an individual can be. Just because it has roots deep in the past and is preserving a Gospel eternally relevant to the human situation in whatever century we may be, and because it is, at the same time, a human institution, its good news tends to be buried beneath the lumber of ages. Hampered by the slow momentum of its life and the drag of its vested interests, the Church exhibits a torpor and sloth which is distressing, if not revolting, to keen and courageous minds. Such lethargy is to be deplored, but in part it is an inevitable characteristic of institutions. The conservatism of a successful and powerful Trade Union, for instance, is proverbial, though it too is meant to be a fighting organization. But neither the Church nor the Union is to be rejected on that account. The roots of the Church lie in the necessity of corporate worship, which is basic to any Christian discipleship. But to maintain itself in, and to withstand the pressure of, the world, it was bound to become an institution, and it is foolish to blame it for exhibiting the characteristics common to institutions. Again, part of

its weakness is its strength; its immobility gives it great staying power in critical times like the present.

This, however, in no way excuses a Church which presents a blank refusal to any reform within itself. Because an institution is slow moving, that is no reason for acquiescing in more sloth than is inevitable. The strength of the Church lies in the fact that it raises up prophets from within itself who are shocked by its pretensions and denounce them. But for this it would indeed be a sorry spectacle. Once a Church (for we are still thinking of the whole body of organized Christendom divided into denominations) identifies its claims with those of the reign of God on the one hand, or persecutes or silences, or casts out prophets from within its ranks on the other, it becomes dead, and the claims for it advanced in this chapter rightly cease to deserve to be considered. For this reason the position of the Roman Catholic Church is a matter of grave concern to many Christians. Generally speaking, however, it remains true that the Church, through its witness to the sovereignty and love of God, has the one secret of unity in the world, the one ultimate guard against self-deception and idolatry. At the same time it is true that the Church itself has fallen under the judgement of God for its reaction-



ary and comfortable behaviour, its tendencies towards an exaggerated pessimism or a naïve optimism. And, once again, prophetic movements exist within the Church calling it back to a war against sin and unrighteousness, often in spite of the official leadership. The point is that such prophetic protests do arise within the Church, not from the sentimental or cynical movements around it, because the Church alone has within itself a standard whereby to judge all human actions and a corrective to all human pride. In the very process of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments it judges, not only the worshippers, but itself.

Therefore no one should be asked to hand his conscience over to the Church, or to be an unthinking and uncritical member of it. Its job is not to issue authoritative regulations, nor primarily to make pronouncements. It cannot be too often emphasized that these are not the crucial contributions of the Church. The hunger for "pronouncements" from Bishops and Church bodies is one of the most depressing instances of the paralysis of individual Christian judgements, or of the presumption of sections of humanity in endeavouring to get God's sanction for their particular proposals. The Church, rather, can bring all men into a unity based not upon their

own merits and achievements, but upon a common dependence on God. With this as the focus of all their activities, men and women are called upon to exercise their critical loyalty in making the institutional Church a better witness to its Gospel, and so to mitigate the extent to which its sins prevent its message being understood. They are also called to bring to bear their Christian witness in daily life, every act of choice being in obedience to the radical claims of the Gospel. They are sent out into the world to redeem society, working within secular organizations in the way that their balanced judgement and analysis of the facts of the situation would suggest. Such organizations may be Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, Local Government, professional and technical associations, voluntary propaganda societies, and the hundred and one different bodies and movements by which social life is affected and changed. Critical of themselves, having a simple standard of living in material matters, they will find the centre of their life in the common worship of the Christian Church. And in their daily decisions in civil life is to be seen the most significant witness of the Church in terms relevant to current social life.

There have been at different times in the Church's history, and are to-day, small groups of Christians organizing themselves on subsistence

and "communistic" lines, and all honour to those who break away from current conventions in this fashion. Their main function is to remind Christians of the vanity of human wishes and the deceitfulness of the cares of this world; but they are not, as is often claimed for them, a prototype of what the Church as a whole should be. They have no relevance to the specific problem of achieving justice and brotherhood in a highly complex industrial society, which is the task that Christians have to face in the twentieth century. That can only be done through the corporate action of politics on the one hand, and the daily decision of individual Christians in their jobs, on the other. In both it is a layman's vocation, and in so far as it is attempted by Christian laymen, to that extent the primary social witness of the Church is seen.

On those who feel that this analysis of the unique contribution of Christianity is unsatisfactory, falls the onus of showing what other world view is anything like so adequate to sustain the onerous tasks of social reconstruction in Britain. For *some* world view there must be. In fact we are witnessing the breakdown of the attempt to emancipate mankind from what were thought to be the fetters of Christian doctrine. The eighteenth-century thinkers of the enlightenment believed that, freed from the outworn dogmas of Christendom, the

natural goodness of men and their innate rationality would ensure a harmonious future for humanity and a material and moral progress of an incalculable extent. Material progress has indeed been achieved, and for a time made this confidence in the inherent powers of man, this "humanism", plausible; we owe much to it, and much of what it stood for should find a place in any Christian understanding of life. But it is now clear that left to himself man loses confidence in himself. The Christian "superstitions" being cleared out, seven devils worse enter. Now that the economic expansion of the nineteenth century, which made the liberal epoch possible, has come to an end, the liberal intellectual tradition and the "humanistic" outlook is collapsing all round us under the pressure of the strains of the social and political system. Finding it no longer possible to rest in their own self-sufficiency, men are giving passionate loyalty to old tribal gods of blood, race, and soil, or unquestioned obedience to the State, or leaders of a nation, and may destroy what remains of European civilization in doing so. Even Russia, which has made a noble attempt to control the economic power which is so potent in a technical civilization, has so far only increased the *political* strength of those in power, so that they can identify any opposition to themselves as

counter-revolutionary activities and "Trotskyism". Everywhere man ceases to count as man. He is treated as a unit in a process, and his dignity as a thinking moral being outraged.

The truth of the Christian analysis of man and the meaning of his life is daily becoming clearer. The Church, which at times in its history has forgotten its divine mission, and in its sinful pretensions treated man almost as the new paganism do, is now seen to be the real guardian of human dignity. It holds fast to the worth of every man and woman because it begins with an understanding of the extent to which men are *not* moral and rational. It knows that man is a divided creature who, when he searches his soul, finds not innate goodness, but division; great possibilities combined with egoism of a demonic character. It knows, therefore, that no man or group of men can be trusted with the power that comes from the unquestioning loyalty and obedience of followers. Having begun by realizing the true situation, it can then go on to claim great things for this queer creature man, because God places such a value on him that He sent His Son into the world to conquer the frustrations of humanity. So the Church is not disposed to accept the pretensions of these new tin gods; its ultimate loyalty lies elsewhere. With such a faith the Church can

face four-square all the evils of the world; it need shirk no issues. It is not a prey to cheap hopes or cheaper fears, nor to cynicism. Because it has the secret of life it will outlast the false gods of a decaying capitalist society as it will the pretensions of the builders of the Soviet economy. It cannot promise security to its members, but it can promise that within its understanding of life man can find freedom and dignity, the peace which comes from trust in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the bond of unity which is to be found nowhere else in the world. This is its message to those non-Christians who, quite rightly, see the necessity of remedying the abuses which disgrace our society; it is a challenge to them to ask whether they have put themselves and their plans in the right perspective. To Christians, the challenge of the Church is to play their full part in the affairs of men, to bring social life within the radical perspective of their faith and to spur that same Church to be truer to its own conviction.

## III

The function of the Church, then, is not to make social judgements for its members but to create the creators of a new society; to help Chris-

tians so to ground themselves in the worship of the Church and the biblical view of life, that they will make the right choices in their daily acts of obedience to the Kingdom. Christianity is either most real in daily work or it loses most of its significance. In daily work everyone, however circumscribed by authority and social custom, has some freedom. But the actual demands of Christianity in such concrete situations can only be decided from within that situation in the light of all the circumstances. No third party can make the decision and it is, therefore, essential for Christians to have the Christian sensitivity to know where a moral issue as distinct from a purely technical one is involved. Having laid stress on the core of Christian teaching, we are now free to add that the Christian Church can help its members in many ways to respond correctly to the moral issues, big and little, which present themselves.

Some of these ways have already been referred to in other contexts. The most important is to train Christians to appreciate the dangers of "imaginary objectivity" in their thinking; that is, to help them to see the immense force of individual and group self-interest in determining moral attitudes. This self-knowledge is more important than correct technical knowledge and

more important than awareness of the sins of others. It is basic to any honest Christian choice. Christians must appreciate the extent to which false slogans and rationalizations colour their social opinions, and be led to question seriously decisions which coincide with their economic advantage. An independent Church is in the best position to bring about such a salutary repentance, hence the importance of a reformed Church. A corollary of this is that Christians should be helped to interpret the hopes and fears of different sections of society to each other, and thus to allay, to some extent, political and social misunderstandings. Such a gift is rare, but it ought to be one of the choicest contributions of Christians to social life.

Instances of the kind of criticism which Christians might be expected to advance on our own social system have already been detailed, and whilst not authoritative, they give a very strong lead which most Christians are likely to find convincing. They illustrate another element which should characterize Christian judgements, that is, the ability to appreciate more keenly the human consequences of a situation, to penetrate beyond statistics. It is part of their radical understanding of the nature of man that they should be more sensitive to the oppression of the human spirit,



both in isolated instances, as, for example, cases of victimization in mining communities, and also on a larger scale arising out of the institutional arrangements of society, which were referred to in Chapter II.

Finally, there is a task for the Church, a stage further removed from the heart of the Christian Faith; that is, to help in understanding the existing situation in the secular world, the tendencies at work in it, and the probable effects of specific actions and choices. Without some such study, however rough, Christians cannot make choices at all, as we saw in Chapter III, and yet so far the Church has hardly attempted to help on these lines. To do so, would require the experience of men and women in many different occupations and classes, as well as the work of scientific analysis. For this, new types of Christian ministry are needed, and once more the question of necessary changes in the institutional Churches is raised, if they are to cope with the needs of the times. We must now turn to these very practical matters; specific tasks for the Church as an institution to set itself, and specific instances of activity awaiting the participation of individual Christians, if the problems of Christians in society are to be effectively dealt with by our generation.

CHAPTER V

STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH AND THE  
CHRISTIAN

THE real problem which faces us is that which was the theme of the Oxford Conference of 1937; namely, how to help those both inside and outside the Churches to realize that in the daily decisions which millions of citizens make in their homes and at work, and in the social institutions on which our society depends and which it encourages, are expressed the real beliefs which we hold about man's life and destiny. Christianity as we have seen has quite definite and clear-cut convictions on these points; convictions which alone are able to maintain the dignity of man in a world where on all sides he is being treated as less than a human personality who possesses the freedom of a child of God. They are, however, unpopular because they challenge both the pride of those in power who will not admit any authority above their own, and the complacency of those who, because they are unwilling to acknowledge the need for repentance, will sell their soul to some human authority. Such an authority ends by

depriving them of human dignity, but on the surface it magnifies individual pride by merging it into the corporate egoism of a race or nation.

It is in the realm of daily life and public policy that the battle is joined. If the Christian position is true, it must be relevant and be *seen* to be relevant to the common life of men and nations. For the penalty of ignoring it in a highly technical and interlocked civilization is disastrous. With all the resources of propaganda and of organization made possible by applied science, humanity can be physically enslaved, and mentally conditioned, by those in authority. Those in power, having no understanding of the searching judgments of God upon the human heart, give vent to the most unchecked egoism, which destroys and corrupts, not only their own souls, but those over whom modern technical resources have given them control. Not that human personality can be permanently outraged in this fashion; just because he is made in the image of God and God is active in history, man cannot for ever be treated in this fashion. Sooner or later outraged human nature rebels and paganisms crash, but at a terrible cost.

The Christian, therefore, though confident that ultimately God's rule in history will be vindicated, cannot sit back and let events take their course.

Realizing that social institutions and economic organizations are always in a process of modification, the Christian must endeavour to secure that as decisions are called for, they are taken within the Christian perspective. These decisions are, on the one hand, large scale political issues or issues affecting an industry or a section of it, where they have to be taken by many people at once, and on the other, decisions within a given social framework, which one individual can take by himself. Both types of decisions are those of individuals, but the circumstances in which they are taken vary. Both types of decisions may be important or comparatively unimportant as far as this world is concerned; but in so far as in making them men and women are exercising, in however small a sphere, their responsibility for free decision, it is all important whether they are consciously made in the light of the claims of the Kingdom of God or not.

If the fundamental relevance of the Christian Faith to the common life is not realized by the majority of Christians, it is not surprising that our fellow-citizens fail to see it. So long as most Christians by "the Church" mean the clergy (as the common reference to an ordinand as one who is "entering the Church" suggests) or confine "Christian" activity to church-going, we have hardly

begun to appreciate the full meaning of Christian obedience. We tend to be paralysed by an uneasy feeling that Christianity "will not work" if it is brought into touch with practical matters. Such a feeling springs partly from unworthy limitations of what is possible to Christians who make an effort, individually or corporately, to tackle specific problems, and partly from the idea that Christianity expects perfection to be reached immediately. On the contrary, we have seen that what it *does* expect is obedience to the Will of God in the changing circumstances with which each individual has to deal.

By what means can the witness of Christians in society be made more effective? It is obvious from the constantly changing and immediate character of Christian decisions, that we are not searching for detailed policies or codes of conduct which could be promulgated as "Christian" ways of behaviour in the contemporary world. That is impossible. The problem is how the individual Christian can be helped to understand more clearly the moral issues with which he has to deal, and when he has understood them how his witness can be made more effective. In considering these two points we shall deal first with the contribution of the Churches as corporate bodies, and in the latter part of the chapter with indivi-

dual Christians. No hard and fast division can be drawn between the two, but the distinction can be usefully kept in mind. Moreover, although in this chapter an attempt will be made to be more specific, yet it is only possible to be specific in regard to certain types of action and certain general issues. All the vital points on which decisions depend will be local and each problem can only be worked out as it occurs.

## I

From one point of view the Churches are social institutions, like Trade Unions, sports clubs, or Rate-payers' Associations. They consist of all those who have accepted the claims of Jesus Christ, and who, in common worship, seek to live in His strength. But the mere fact of associating together has led them to form themselves into denominations which hold property and employ paid servants, and which from the sociological point of view are social institutions, whose relations with one another and with the community as a whole, are a matter of politics.

An institution, as Chapter IV indicated, is bound to be slow moving by the very fact that it is an institution; and the Church more than most because its roots are so deep in the past. But that

is no reason for it never to change at all, and we have to ask ourselves if changes in the institutional structure of the Churches themselves are not necessary for two reasons. One is that a Church which reflects too uncritically the standards and habits of the world around it, is not in a position to help its members to form independent judgements for themselves. The second is that, just because it is a social institution, it is important that in its structure and organization a continual attempt should be made to approximate to Christian standards, both as a witness to the fact that the material things of life are to be used to the glory of God, and also to prevent men from being alienated from the Gospel by needless discrepancies between the demands of that Gospel and the practice of the institutional Church. An organized Church cannot avoid sharing in some measure in the features of the secular society in which it is rooted; but there is a great deal of difference between being unconscious of the connection or even consciously approving of things as they are, and being critically aware of the relationship and on the look out for improvements and ready for change. There has been in England a noteworthy general connection between the landed classes and the Church of England, and between the industrial and commercial classes and

the Free Churches. This is not necessarily deplorable provided that the connection is realized and a continual check kept on it when questions of policy are raised. It has to be accepted and allowed for. As it is there is a general suspicion that the material interests of the Churches are so dependent on the existing order of things that they would offer serious opposition to any political or economic programme which threatened to interfere with their property rights. The Roman Catholic Church in Spain and the Russian Orthodox Church before the Revolution have been notorious, but in England the Tithe disputes have appeared to be a quarrel between two vested interests, rather like the Rail and Road dispute, and comment has often been made on the power of large subscribers in Free Church congregations. Loyal Christians have little or no idea to what extent the Churches are suspected by the general public for the way in which they use their wealth. Indeed, in some quarters the political activities of different denominations, especially in regard to Church Schools, has led many to think of the phrase "Christianity and Politics" as referring to the attempts of Christians to gain favours for their particular denomination by lobbying and representation on local authorities.

It is clear that the Church cannot be too careful



in regard to the sources of its income, the way it administers its property, and in the methods of employment it adopts. It is desirable, for example, that Christians should devote more of their attention to the social conditions and social relationships to be found in ecclesiastical or semi-ecclesiastical organizations. Few of the insurance companies which are attached to religious organizations recognize the rights of their employees to be members of Trade Unions, or negotiate with them through Trade Unions. It may also be urged with justice that in its industrial contracts the Church should adopt the practice of H.M. Government since 1896 and insert, and insist upon the observance of, a "fair wages clause". Christians have no case against the non-Christian world if the standards of their own institutions are merely a reflection of, or not even equal to, those of unredeemed society. The beam is in our own eye. Some of the criticisms which are levelled against the Churches are unreasonable, but there is enough truth in them seriously to compromise them. Only an independent Church can help its members adequately to appreciate the points in daily life where faith is challenged. There is a wide feeling that the present ones are not sufficiently independent of the assumptions of secular society. Within the Church itself large disparities

of income exist, together with most of the social injustices and class distinctions which Christians deplore in the secular world. For instance, by the time an Anglican clergyman has reached the ecclesiastical status of Archdeacon he has reached the social status of "the county".

But the question goes deeper than one of Established or non-Established Churches. In so far as the Churches accept and conform to the economic standards of the world, so they will tend to have their judgements corrupted by these standards, and allow far too much weight to arguments and policies designed to support the *status quo*. If we consider, for instance, the type of person who can afford the time and money to attend the Church Assembly of the Church of England, we shall not be surprised at the opinions which are generally expressed there on the matters raised in this book. There is a valuable paragraph in the Oxford Conference Report, Section 3, on this point: "The economic organization of the Church ought to help and not to hinder the comity in Christ which should be the feature of its common life. There should, therefore, be a reasonable uniformity in the payment of those who hold the same spiritual office, and they ought to be paid according to the real needs of themselves and their families. . . .

It is not tolerable that those who minister to the rich should be comparatively well-off and those who minister to the poor should be poor for that reason alone. It is not right that those who have greater responsibility in the Church or greater gifts of utterance than their brethren should for that reason alone have much larger incomes. It does not express Christian solidarity that churches in poor and depressing districts should be handicapped by an inefficient and unlovely plant which would not be tolerated in the assemblies of the rich. So long as the institution has those defects in its organization it will corrupt most subtly the vocational sense of its ministry, and prejudice its witness in the world. On the other hand, if its members were more continuously critical of its economic structure and were quick to reform evils in it, such concrete action would release spiritual power." In this connection a scheme for the economic reform of the Church of England which was embodied in a pamphlet, *Men, Money and the Ministry*,<sup>1</sup> published in 1937, and the subsequent discussions on it, should be noticed as an excellent attempt to remedy some of the evils which particularly concern that Church.

Who can doubt that efforts on these lines would

<sup>1</sup> Longmans, Green & Co. 1s. net. A new edition is expected to be issued in the autumn of 1939.

release spiritual power and help to create a more independent Church? For the extent to which economic dependence can corrupt judgement is hard to over-estimate. This is a theme which could well be treated at length, but something has already been said upon it in Chapter.III, and it is impossible to go into it more fully here. One more illustration must suffice. In their pronouncements after the Munich Agreement of September 1938, the Church leaders gave the impression that only one possible verdict could be given by Christians on it, and that a favourable one. Yet a large proportion of the country, including the bulk of the organized working-class movement, was opposed to it. The question is not, Which was right? but, Why do Church leaders almost invariably echo the ideas of the ruling classes? The answer is partly to be found in the education and upbringing of most of the clergy and partly in the economic dependence of the Churches on the existing social and economic system. While this is so they cannot claim to be in a position to make a balanced judgement. Yet this should, of course, be their aim.

Nor is a disunited Church likely to help its members as effectively as it ought in their daily decisions. We can only here note the existence of the problems of Reunion. The sin of disunity

has not, by any means, assailed the conscience of the average Christian of this country, though much valuable work is being done by the Œcumenical Movement and the "Friends of Reunion". As we shall see, hardly any problems can be tackled on a parochial basis, nor is a denominational basis much better. In addition to the spiritual failure of which the disunion of non-Roman Catholic Christians is a constant reminder (the Roman Catholic Church must, unfortunately, be left out of the discussion for the moment), the wastage in organization and man-power is tremendous, just at a time when new types of ministry are urgently needed. In many places, however, interdenominational co-operation is in progress, and one could wish a wide extension of it. A common enterprise between Christians of different denominations is one of the chief ways by which Christians can realize the unity which already exists between them, and on the basis of which they can press forward to an organizational unity (not uniformity). Unless the theological discussions of "Faith and Order" are supplemented by experience of co-operation in "Life and Work", and the corporate worship to which common action leads, they are likely to degenerate into arid hair-splitting by intellectual and spiritual vested interests. Both need to go

together, though we are concerned at the moment with the latter. Corporate Christian action, therefore, is a matter of great importance if the Christian community is to express itself effectively in society. To this we must now turn.

It has been well said that the conditions of receiving the Spirit are a readiness to find out what God's will is and a willingness to make experiments in one's immediate situation in an attempt to fulfil it. This is as true of the congregation as of the individual. Corporate worship should be balanced by corporate activity. In any neighbourhood there are always certain points to which the Christian congregations could profitably turn their attention. Instances occur to mind of one Christian group which investigated the evils resulting from the abuse of the Hire-Purchase System in their town and published the results, or of a young men's Bible class which formed a Housing Trust under whose auspices seventy-two houses were built. The attack on the problem of refugees, especially the securing of financial guarantees by the co-operation of Christian congregations, is a topical illustration. Or again there are the efforts made by Christian groups in some new housing areas to create a real community life in the neighbourhood, or of others to tackle the serious problems of the disintegrating

village. These are all indications of possible lines of action. There are also specific matters in local government affairs, for example, particularly bad cases of housing or high rents (*not* only Sunday cinemas!) where Christians could be active. On wider national questions such as the raising of the school-leaving age, or blind-alley jobs, opinion and policy can often be influenced locally by Christians. It is good to note that the clergy of all denominations of a depressed town in Wales presented a joint letter on the administration of the Means Test. In all these questions, what is required is vision among local Christians to see where something needs doing, drive to undertake it, and refusal to think exclusively in terms of the usual Church activities of meetings and week-day groups, which are not meant for advance but for consolidation. It must be emphasized that not every member of the congregation will be in agreement with the steps taken or the policy pursued, but that need be no bar to common Christian worship and fellowship. If on certain definite points there is fairly general agreement, it is incumbent on Christians to act in accordance with that agreement. Everyone should be able to express his opinion and those in the minority must accept the fact. A question of faith is not involved, nor is there any question of tying the Church to

any one political party. It is merely a necessary attempt to deal with particular situations as they arise. To keep in the same fellowship those who differ on immediate policies is, as was pointed out in the last chapter, the choicest contribution of the Christian Church to the problem of social life. And this must apply even where feelings run very deep, as in a strike, or between pacifists and non-pacifists in war time.

It follows from this that the Christian congregations in a locality ought to have links with the many different aspects of community life. Frequently the clergy and the staunch Christians move in too narrow a circle. Not only is it desirable that different bodies such as Chambers of Commerce on the one hand, or Trade Unions on Industrial Sunday, on the other, should be associated with public worship, but the experience of different leaders of the community could well be brought to bear upon specific problems. Juvenile employment and unemployment, for instance, is a pressing issue, different aspects of which are met with by school teachers, doctors, probation officers, Ministry of Labour officials, Works Managers and Trade Union secretaries. In certain circumstances a common local policy could be arrived at, within the limits set by national economic institutions, informed by the



pooled experience of such men and women. Where they can be called together on a Christian basis it is all the better, but where they are not all Christians it is often only under Christian auspices that those representing such divergent economic interests can be induced to meet at all.

It has already been said that the task of the Church is not to give detailed guidance to its members. Leaving aside such corporate witness as that with which we have just been concerned, its remaining function is to help its members in worship, and in the way in which it trains them in prayer and Bible reading, so that they may make the right response to the daily decisions they have to face in work and leisure. This involves two big questions, that of worship, and that of research and new types of ministry. There is space only to refer to both of them very briefly.

Worship has not only the function of raising the human soul above the sins and failures and the cramping conditions of this world into the light and power of the eternal facts of the Christian Gospel. It has also the task of relating men and women, filled with new power and new vision, to the actual circumstances of their daily lives. We may quote a paragraph from the same Oxford Conference Report, "One of the tasks which is laid upon the Church, which is not easy to carry

out in the existing state of things, is to re-establish in the experience of men and women a unity of work and worship. While their irrelevance one to another at the present time is partly because much work is pagan and unworshipful, it is also due to the fact that the daily business of the modern world . . . is not sufficiently woven into the liturgy and worship of the Church. Unless men are required to ask forgiveness, to make petitions and to give thanks for the things with which they are chiefly concerned day by day, public worship will begin to seem secondary. There should be no discontinuity between the sanctuary and the life and work in office, factory or home, for the God we worship cares for the whole of men's life, and not only for that part of it which is specifically religious." This would suggest that, among other things, certain changes are necessary in the training of candidates for the Ministry. The problem is one that would repay careful thought, though this is not the place to dwell upon it further.

We come now to research. This is necessary, not with the object of providing cut-and-dried plans of action, but in order that the attention of individual Christians may be directed to the more significant social issues. It is unfortunately necessary, to add that this research must be carried on

by those thoroughly competent to undertake it. The Christian Church has suffered, and still does suffer in this country, from Christians and Church bodies who publish statements and comments on matters which require a certain technical competence, a competence which it is only too obvious that they do not possess. This is particularly the case in the sphere of economics and sociology. Such research also requires the co-operation of laymen and women actually engaged in industrial and social activities. On the basis of work of this kind it would be possible to keep abreast of all the best knowledge of the day and utilize it in the service of Christians. When, for instance, an attempt at planning an industry is under discussion, which involves a scheme of rationalization, it could be pointed out to Christians that this is not a matter of indifference to them, but that it involves the whole question as to whose interest the scheme is intended to serve. Is it to be that of employers, workers or consumers, and to what extent is the control of it to be in public or private hands? The Christian has here to make a conscious decision on the basis of his faith, as to what is the best alternative available at the moment.

Arising out of the Œcumenical Movement, a British "Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life" is being set up to undertake re-

search work on every aspect of contemporary life and not only on social and economic questions. It is most urgent that it should be supported enthusiastically by Churches and Church people. Such research requires as its corollary new types of ministry. If contacts are to be made with men and women in their daily life, the single parochial or congregational unit is quite inadequate. There must be ministers who, in addition to their theological equipment, are specialists in some particular aspect of life, industrial production, commerce, education, psychology, medicine and so on, and there must be opportunities for corporate thinking and experiment between Christians of like experience and occupation. For this the local congregation is not sufficiently representative. Moreover, it is not in many towns and suburbs the focus of a coherent community; and the position in villages is often not very different now. There is, therefore, a need for a more complex Church structure with an increase of specialist groups within it, and links with all the voluntary societies of the area, so that a Christian strategy for the town as a whole can be worked out. This is not to say that the congregation as a worshipping unit, or the pastoral activities of the "general practitioner" parson, are outmoded or likely to become outmoded, but rather that a richer organizational life demands a

more varied ministry to supplement the present system. It might be a lay ministry, though not necessarily a full-time one. It would certainly work over a large area as its unit. To provide it would involve many constitutional and financial difficulties, into which it is impossible to enter here. But if we are working towards a Church in which worship, work, and witness are one, such a ministry will have to be provided; and if the need is urgent enough, it is impossible to believe that the united efforts and resources of the different Churches could not find the means. Again, it would almost certainly have to be on an interdenominational basis.

The question of research and new types of ministry leads on to the witness of individual Christians in society in their daily work and leisure. Here, we must once more affirm, is to be found the primary contribution of the Church to social life, that of laymen and women at home, among their friends, and at their work. We must now consider through what other channels, the worship and guidance of the Christian Fellowship being behind them, their witness can be made most effective.

## II

Decisions on strategy depend to some extent upon our understanding of what are, in fact, the

main formative influences and factors in society. One of the assumptions of this book is that industrial and commercial organization, and the relations which develop between men in the processes of earning a living, do, at any rate in Great Britain, determine the main outlines of social organization and the main characteristics of social relationships. The very existence of Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, London, or any of the towns and cities of Great Britain, depends upon industry and commerce. The quality of citizenship is largely a product of the way business is conducted, and is certainly limited and restricted by industrial necessities. When considering action by Christians in obedience to their experience of God, we therefore turn first to action in relation to this industrial and economic groundwork of society. If we leave action in this realm entirely to non-Christians we surrender strategic positions, and, in consequence, content ourselves with fostering the creation of "men of character" to serve in whatever social organization non-Christians create. No matter where we feel we can best begin to discharge our social obligations as Christians, unless at some stage we act in relation to industry and commerce, we are evading the really critical issues. For centuries Christian attention to this matter has been fitful and spasmodic.

Consequently we have no well-designed technique or method which we can modify to meet our present needs. We must make a new beginning.

One point at which a beginning might usefully be made is the consideration of the jobs we do in order to earn a living. In a group of people whose work is similar to our own we can see that those problems which we meet with in our work are, many of them, closely associated with the organization and motives of economic life. To learn to state the problems clearly is half the battle, for, once stated, lines of solution, though often costly to follow, are frequently not difficult to devise. An illustration of what might arise can be taken from the case of a group of office workers in the City of London, all of whom are Christians, keen to live in accordance with their deepest spiritual insights. On reviewing their working conditions it was clear that their wages were low when compared with the standard of respectability demanded of them and when the cost of travelling to and from the City had been taken into account. Their hours were long and their positions insecure. Yet they worked in prosperous firms. In the interests of justice clearly "something should be done about it". What?—and how? The answer to the first question is obvious.

Not only their wages and conditions, but those of all the others similarly engaged need to be improved. To make representations to the employers on these matters requires that all should act together and that action should be through an organization representing all the employees. This involves setting up the equivalent of a Trade Union, if one does not already exist, and the achievement of the social solidarity which such action implies. In this way, by beginning with reflection on some problems met with in their jobs, these men find themselves faced with the necessity of establishing a Trade Union Organization or Branch.

One guarantee that such action will be responsible in character and not simply "predatory" is that, in developing a Trade Union, care is taken at the same time to deepen the Christian Fellowship from which it all began. There is a danger that once having set out on this plan, religious life gives place to political tactics, with irreparable loss to both. This does not mean that the alternative is the setting up of a "Christian" Trade Union, but it does mean maintaining both religious fellowship, worship, and devotion, and Trade Union activity, without confusing or identifying the two.

This is just one example of how a "vocational



group" might develop. From this point action by Christians can reach out to the way in which industry is run and play a part in reshaping the foundations of society.

This illustration assumes that those in the group agree upon a line of action which they are prepared to take as a group. Such agreement is by no means likely to be reached in all instances, but its absence is no criticism of the method, since the primary purpose in meeting together in this way is not agreement but that the members of the group may severally see for themselves an appropriate line of action, and take action which, in their view, is likely to remedy the injustice they have experienced or witnessed. Members of the group may set out to work in *different* secular movements which pursue *different* policies even if in general terms they have an agreed objective. This fact should be a constant source of discussion in the group, though not a cause of a breach of fellowship, nor of the disruption of the group. This is merely another way of saying that the Christian community is not a fellowship of like-minded people. It is a fellowship created by God and held together by common worship of God. This fellowship is not maintained by suppressing differences either of religious insight or political judgement, since such suppression renders it life-

less and fruitless. The objective is that Christians should be politically active, not that they should be politically like-minded. Within the group, differences in judgement and insight should be critically examined to the enrichment of the understanding of all its members. Such a fellowship recognizes that its reason for existence is the love of God, and it can only exist on the basis of this realization. Its members will be politically active, though they will recognize that their fellowship is not based on political agreement. To keep this in mind involves, as was seen in the last chapter, a clear understanding of the true nature of the Church and its richest contribution to society. Whether the vocational groups agree or disagree on a specific action, their existence should encourage action by individual members, and this should be both enriched and checked by discussion and common worship. It is a great test of loyalty to God.

This method need not be confined to commercial life. The most familiar vocational groups in the Christian Church are groups of teachers and educationalists. These groups, which examine the meaning of religious education and the problems of the teacher in his profession, are of inestimable value both in helping individuals in their personal and political judgements on

educational issues and in stimulating the growth of a body of thought derived from the experience of Christians in State and other schools, and in voluntary religious organizations and movements. Our plea here is that the method so usefully adopted by teachers who are Christians should be extended to office workers, industrial workers, bankers, works managers, and others. There exists an "Institute of Christian Education at Home and Overseas" for the guidance of thought on educational matters, but no parallel organization made up of men and women involved in industrial and commercial pursuits. Most attempts to render the same service for industry have been attempts by bishops, clergy, ministers, and Church leaders to devise from outside, canons of conduct in accordance with which those in industry are called upon, usually vainly, to act, rather than an effort on the part of those who have the responsibility of working industry to fashion for themselves, as laymen, such guidance as is appropriate both to their religious insight and their industrial experience.

Very good reasons would have to be produced if concentration upon this line of action is to be avoided. There remains, however, a whole range of social activities and of demands upon Christians by the responsible authorities of the locality

or State which require critical examination and which do not readily fit into this category. An excellent example is the present call to National Service in defence of our country against possible attacks from nations with a different culture and a different religious and political outlook. In response to this appeal Christians cannot evade the responsibility of acting, and it is clearly important that their action should be the subject of most careful consideration within the circle of their own fellowship. It may be assumed that we are not prepared to defend everything in our national life and our national culture, because there are some elements in it of which we could well be rid. There are others which we justly seek to preserve. In other words, in response to the appeal for National Service, discussion amongst Christians might well lead to the discovery of a new patriotism, and to the demand for a foreign policy which would lead us into international conflict (if that be unavoidable), on the right issues. Discoveries made in this way naturally lead the Christian into political activity not only in terms of foreign policy but also of domestic justice, since the remedying of injustice at home creates the conditions under which the only kind of national unity which makes a good foreign policy possible can be

achieved. Experience of justice at home both predisposes us to appreciate its meaning between nations and creates that unity within the nation that enables a just foreign policy to be actively pursued. The Christian group would therefore be led to examine our national life in such a way as to reveal its weaknesses, and Christians would be expected so to act as to remove these. Some of the points which would merit attention would be unemployment, blind-alley employment, class distinctions in education, malnutrition, and similar particular instances of the general criticisms of society embodied in Section 3 of the Oxford Conference Report. In studying and discussing these, members of the Christian Church would try to arrive at a judgement concerning the right immediate programmes to which they could give their support. Decisions of this kind necessarily involve the individual Christian in participation in the activities of a political party or social movement, and as we saw in the case of vocational activities, all Christians do not necessarily arrive at the same decision on these matters. Failure would lie, not in the fact of disagreement, but in the refusal of the individual members to make and follow their own judgements or in differences of individual judgement being allowed to break the fellowship.

It cannot be too strongly insisted that, although *discussion* on social issues takes place in the Christian Fellowship, the sphere of *action* is in secular political and social organizations (of course the corporate Christian action to which we have referred may also be possible). If we want to raise the school-leaving age, or to remove juveniles and young persons from industrial exploitation, or to improve wages, hours, and conditions in industry, or redistribute industrial power and responsibility, this has to be done in and through a political movement designed to achieve these ends and capable of assuming political power and putting into operation a policy to realize them.

In order to make a democracy work at all this assumption of social responsibility on the part of the individual citizen is imperative. We can only maintain democracy if we are prepared to make judgements and to act in accordance with our decisions through politics; and "politics" in this case must be taken to include the whole range of industrial and commercial relationships. Discussion of these matters inside the Christian Fellowship enables us to ensure that spiritual experience is related to our political decisions. Having arrived at a decision it can be truly said that the only Christian thing in the situation is the Christian himself, since many non-Christians

will be found who, for different reasons, wish to pursue the same policy and put into effect the same programme. For this reason we cannot expect to find in the political groups the same standard of personal relationships as we ought to find within our own Christian Fellowship. It is, however, clearly incumbent upon the Christian in politics to treat others as he treats his fellow-Christians, and to look upon his opponents and his fellow party members as "brothers for whom Christ died", and not regard the former merely as the incarnation of political opposition.

It is explicitly affirmed in the basis of a number of Christian movements that a part of their purpose is to transcend class barriers between people. In others it is implicit. A good deal can indeed be done by Christians of different social and economic classes to develop mutual understanding by informal social contacts and in the fellowship of home life. Furthermore, within Christian groups, at least, the Christian must seek to transcend the general practices of society, and learn to move freely and easily in all classes, without patronage or servility, conscious primarily of a common Faith. It must not be assumed, however, that class conflict can be stamped out by these means. To attain a high degree of fellowship in spite of economic class distinctions is not an excuse for

their continued existence. It can, in fact, only be looked upon as a prelude to their removal.

There is one choice which is presented to all Christians in their social life, and they are slow to realize that it involves a moral issue at all. They are all consumers, and most domestic commodities can be bought from either of two quite distinct sources, a capitalist firm, or a Co-operative Society. These represent different principles of social organization, and adopt different criteria of the relationships between employers, workers, and consumers in the process of production and distribution. A Christian has to decide which he thinks fosters better human relationships and support it, subject to general considerations as to the type and quality of the goods. Here is a definite choice, not to be ignored or treated as a matter of indifference.

In whatever social order the Christian finds himself, and in whatever political campaign he joins, he will always find that any system of justice can be improved upon by acts of charity, and that the administration of that system of justice depends in part upon the quality of the men who administer it. For example, we may differ profoundly as to the right form of legislation concerning unemployment and its relief, but we should all agree that under this or any system it is highly import-



ant that competent and sensitive men should be in charge of the Employment Exchanges and on Unemployment Assistance Boards. We may equally differ on the right treatment of Young Offenders against the law, but we should agree that Probation Officers and Borstal Masters should be men of high personal qualities. In work of this kind Christians might be expected to take a special interest, ensuring that the existing provisions are used in the best possible way and that inadequate provisions are not allowed to deteriorate even further by the default of Christian volunteers and trainees for these and similar jobs. In addition, over and above the provision of an adequate supply of Christians equipped for these responsibilities, there are acts of love and kindness which are expected of a Christian: in doing these he not only gets the best out of what is offered, but paves the way for further legislation.

Whilst both points remain true of any social order, yet it is important that actions of this type should not be an excuse for remaining content with existing legal provisions and social arrangements. They, in fact, constitute a constant witness that further justice is desirable, and needs to be expressed in legislation of similar appropriate and general form. In this connection action by Christians might first take the form of a series of experiments

in regard to education, health, housing, and conditions of employment, examples of all of which can be found to-day. It is incumbent upon Christians so to experiment as to pave the way to more general enactments in these and other respects. Not that in these ways the problem is solved, but by these means lines along which a general solution can be found are explored and demonstrated to society as a whole. There are limits to the sphere in which such experiments can be usefully carried out, and limits beyond which general political agitation is more fruitful than continued experiment; but if the point is kept clearly in mind that experiment is to be the prelude to more generalized social and political action, then this form of Christian conduct can fulfil a very useful role in social life.

There is, therefore, a vast amount of social service within the present system which a Christian can fruitfully undertake, provided he pays attention to the necessity for political change at the same time. In addition there are all the issues arising out of industrial and commercial organization and community life which should claim his attention. There is no lack of opportunities for the expression of Christian discipleship in society. We may conclude by reminding ourselves once more that the consideration of them is one of the most useful means of interdenominational co-

operation, and that more adequate social action by Christians on such a basis may have the invaluable by-product of creating conditions under which a united Church becomes a possibility.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY

IN attempting to summarize briefly the main contentions of the previous chapters, we cannot do better than begin by reminding ourselves of the central convictions about the Christian Faith and life, which, if we accept them, distinguish us from those who follow other philosophies and religions. The Christian life has been likened to many things in the course of time. To some it consists in service to their fellow-men; to others it is a set of noble and high ideals; some have regarded it as a call to imitate the example of Jesus Christ, walking "in His steps", seeking to do as He did; others would focus attention upon those verses of the Sermon on the Mount which speak of meekness, humility, "turning the other cheek", and walking the second mile. However much such convictions are the outcome of the Christian Faith, it is affirmed in this book that they do not in themselves constitute life in the Kingdom. Christianity is a religion and not a set of principles. It is concerned with what God is and what God has done to reveal Himself to

men, especially His revelation of His just, loving, and redeeming nature in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Our Lord, in the creation of His Church, and in the gift of His Holy Spirit. This loving God is seeking men and inviting them to centre their lives in friendship and communion with Himself. The conduct of Christians is the daily and hourly response to this experience. The basis of this Christian conduct is not a set of laws and rules in accordance with which we have to regulate our lives, but a fellowship with God which permeates all our decisions and qualifies all our human relationships. We do not seek to imitate Jesus Christ, but rather to make our decisions and choices in life with a consciousness of His love for us and for all men.

Living the Christian life requires constant meditation upon the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and this means Bible study, for in the Bible lies the source of our understanding of His nature. It is there that the Good News is declared, and to it we must continually turn in order to hear it afresh. Without this our thoughts are apt to become centred upon a God of our own devising. Sharing in the corporate worship of the Christian Church, which enriches our life by fellowship with others who accept the Gospel, is also essential to the Christian life. An attempt on our part to

accept God's initiative and to commune with Him in secret or in the congregation is a natural and necessary activity for those who would know God. These are the well-proven ways of growing into closer union with Him.

With these as our constant experience we turn, in the power of the Spirit, to the business of life in this world, made up as it is of a multitude of decisions, some of them seemingly insignificant and others of major importance. In all of them we try to do what God wills, and the object of Christian worship is to help us to be the kind of people who will know what God does want them to do, and will have the courage to do it. The choices we make are our own, and elements which enter into any judgement, and which give rise to differences of opinion amongst Christians, have already been expounded in Chapter III. For reasons explained in that chapter, none of our choices can claim the title "Christian", and no particular programme of which we approve can be given the status of a "Christian Programme". We *must* make decisions and take part in formulating programmes, no one else can do it for us, but the possibility of error is apparent. There is, therefore, no such thing as a "Christian" programme or "Christian" decision. We rely on God's forgiveness and not upon the infallibility of

our own insight and judgement, or that of the Church.

In carrying out many of these decisions we shall ally ourselves, in so far as social action is necessary, with those who, whether Christian or non-Christian, are seeking the same immediate objectives. If, for example, our judgement is that, in the interest both of equality and public health, free meals should be provided in schools for everyone, then we shall join a movement which has this as one of its aims and which is, in our opinion, capable of effectively advocating this policy. If we decide that litter in the streets and public places is a disgrace to our civilization, we might think it worthwhile to join an Anti-Litter League, quite irrespective of whether all its members are Christians. If we wish to raise minimum wages, or reduce hours of work, or solve the problem of unemployment along certain lines which we consider have a fair chance of success, we shall work for a political party whose general policy seems most likely to include our aims and which seems to be capable of putting them into effect.

Consideration of problems of conduct in society will clearly need to take place within the Christian Fellowship, but to urge this is not to imply that Christians will agree upon what is the right course of action to take. Not all Christians will be

pacifists and not all will agree in their views on National Service. Christians who are bankers, industrialists, workers in shops, factories or offices will not necessarily be of the same mind either on problems arising in their jobs, or on fundamental political issues common to them all. The Christian Fellowship exists, however, not because of agreement on these and similar issues, but because of the love of God for men. It is because this is the reason for the existence of the Church that the bond between Christians is deeper than their differences of political and social judgement. This is often taken to mean that controversial subjects, such as politics, should not be introduced into Church circles for fear of breaking up the fellowship. Clearly they should only be introduced where there is opportunity for discussion, but, given that condition, failure to discuss these matters reveals a fundamental weakness in the Church. The Church's fellowship should not be so frail that it is split by diversities of judgement, nor should such disagreement in any way inhibit individual action on social questions. It should make the Christian better informed and more responsible. Further, the fact that Christians may be found conscientiously supporting opposing sides is a demonstration that men are of value because God loves them and not because



they happen to hold a certain set of political opinions. Even when a Church or congregation as such decides by a majority to favour publicly a particular programme, as for example that of supporting the League of Nations Union, the minority who disagree should feel it possible to remain in the fellowship, as the existence of that Church or congregation depends not upon its avowed policy on these matters but upon faith in Jesus Christ.

The most significant fact of our time is the existence of Christian communities in all parts of the world. At a conference convened by the International Missionary Council, held near Madras in December 1938, Churches from more than sixty countries were represented and together faced the tasks of Christian witness in the world. Here were men and women who, in the most diverse circumstances, were conscious of their unity with their fellow-Christians. Upon the leavening influence of the Churches from which they came depends to a large extent the chances of a world order and international peace. There is no task more important for the Christian Church than that of strengthening the world-wide Christian community. Without the Church the world is without hope, for it alone stands for the proclamation of the Good News of God.

As Christians are coming to see this more clearly through the Œcumenical Movement, they are tempted to turn from the affairs of men and concentrate upon the internal affairs of the Church. Œcumenism, however, should be a method of effectively witnessing as Christians *in* the world and not a method of escape from it into a sheltering Church. Another tendency which the growth of the Œcumenical Movement has furthered is that of declaring that, since movements are now on a world scale, and since the solution of many of our social problems involves world-wide action, there is nothing of importance which we in our local community and with our limited experience can do. While it is true that many problems do require action on a world scale, such action only has meaning in so far as behind it there are local efforts in which we are participating. The reunion of the Christian Church, for example, may need the close attention and devotion of Archbishops, Free Church Leaders, and Cardinals, but all their wisdom cannot bring about that unity in our town or village on which real unity in the end depends. It is only as we act locally as a part of the Universal Church that the Universal Church becomes a reality. The more we think about it, the more clear it becomes that the real test of our Christian convictions is our sensitiveness in discern-

ing and our courage in tackling the moral issues which arise in our daily life at home, at work, and in the community, both local and national, in which we live. To-day there is required a much more thorough-going appreciation by Christians of their responsibility for industrial and social affairs; the life of men and women in the towns and villages, in the factories and shops of our land, must be made the occasion of conscious Christian discipleship. We must realize that in obeying the claims of the Kingdom of God in every activity we are bearing witness that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all life, and so playing our part in the world fellowship of Christians created by Him.

The tasks which face Christians as the twentieth century goes on its way get more, not less, onerous. We might well be tempted to turn aside from a course which makes life so difficult. Yet we cannot, for we know in our hearts that we should be repudiating those truths which go deepest into the problems of human life and give it its meaning. After all, Christianity is not a burden or a problem, but a Gospel. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."<sup>1</sup> Difficult and complex as are the tasks to which loyalty to Jesus Christ will commit us, we know that in trying to live as children of God we are setting our hearts

<sup>1</sup> St. John vi. 68.

on the only things that matter, wherein alone true joy and peace is to be found.

The peace of God is not a state of contemplative-oblivion. It is not achieved by withdrawing from the world's conflicts, but in the midst of them. It is the product of confidence in God's love and His forgiveness, and not in our own abilities. The peace of God, which passes all human understanding, is ours when our hearts and minds are filled with the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, in whose strength we are able to share the burden and struggle of the world and take our place as Christians in society.

## ·SHORT LIST OF BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

*The Churches Survey their Task.* (Allen & Unwin) 5s.

The report of the Oxford Conference 1937: that of Section 3 is reprinted separately as "The Church and the Economic Order", price 6d.

*The Church and its Function in Society.* J. H. Oldham and W. A. Visser 't Hooft. (Allen & Unwin) 8s. 6d.

Part 3 gives a general statement based on all the preparatory work for the Oxford Conference.

*History and the Gospel.* C. H. Dodd. (Nisbet) 6s.  
Especially for Chapter I.

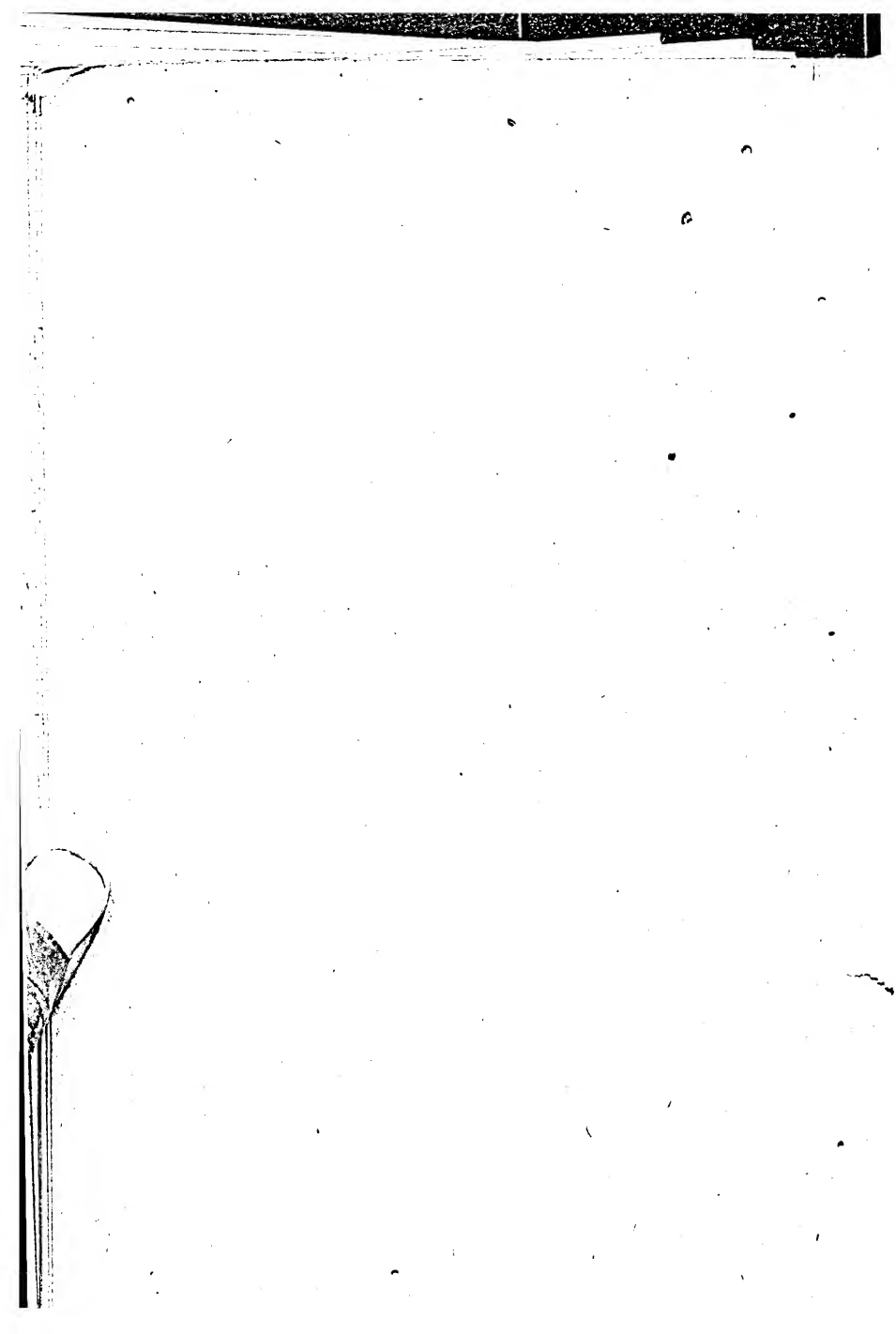
*The Gospels in the Making.* Alan Richardson. (S.C.M. Press) 5s. A simpler statement of the Gospel in the New Testament for those without any acquaintance with recent biblical scholarship.

*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics.* Reinhold Niebuhr. (S.C.M. Press) 6s. A fundamental book, but difficult.

*Christianity and Our World.* John Bennett (S.C.M. Press) 2s. 6d. Shorter and simpler than Niebuhr.

*Equality.* R. H. Tawney. (Workers' Educational Association Edition, 1938) 2s. 6d. Especially for Chapter II.

*The Condition of Britain.* G. D. H. Cole (Gollancz) 7s. 6d.



## INDEX

- Anglican Church, 20  
 Auden, W. H., 108
- Berdyaev, Nicholas, 15
- Capitalism, 89  
 Capitalists, 67  
 Chamber of Commerce, 40, 158  
 Church Assembly of the Church of England, 152  
 Church, Community and State. *See* Oxford Conference  
 Class struggle, 55, 67, 68  
 Communist, 25, 99  
*Confédération Internationale des Etudiants*, 131  
 Conferences. *See* Edinburgh, Madras and Oxford  
 Confessional Church, 99  
 Conservative Party, 66, 67  
 Co-operative Movement, 48, 100, 136, 174  
 Corporative State, 92
- Douglas, Major C. H., 87, 88
- Edinburgh Conference, 20  
 Employers' Federation, 57, 64, 66, 79
- Faith and Order. *See* Edinburgh Conference  
 Fascist, 25, 99  
 Friends of Reunion, 155
- Greek Orthodox Church, 20
- Haldane, Professor J. B. S., 115  
 Hodgson, Canon Leonard, 96
- Ideology, 106  
 Institute of Christian Education at Home and Overseas, 169  
 International Missionary Council, 183
- Kagawa, Toyohiko, 100
- Labour Party, 66, 67  
 League of Nations, 15, 183  
 Liberal Society, 51, 52, 53, 57  
 Life and Work. *See* Oxford Conference  
 Local Government, 136  
 Lutheran Church, 20
- MacNeice, Louis, 108  
 Madras Conference, 183  
 Management Associations, 64, 79  
 Mannheim, Professor Karl, 106  
 Methodism, 104  
 Munich Agreement, 154
- National Income, 74  
 National Socialist, 25, 99, 100  
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, 15
- Ecumenical Movement, 20, 131, 155, 161, 184  
 Oxford Conference, 20, 21, 22, 71, 78, 84, 85, 144  
 Oxford Conference Report, 71, 76, 80, 152, 159, 171

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Oxford Group Movement, 92, 113</p> <p>Pacifism, 70, 113, 114, 115</p> <p>Protestant, 111, 112</p> <p>Reunion, 154</p> <p>Roman Catholic, 110, 134, 150, 155</p> <p>Russell, Bertrand, 114</p> <p>Russian Orthodox, 150</p> <p>Social Credit, 72, 87, 92</p> | <p>Socialism, 89</p> <p>Society of Friends, 20, 113</p> <p>Soviet System, 92, 138, 140</p> <p>Trade Unions, 40, 45, 48, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 79, 105, 133, 136, 148, 151, 158, 166</p> <p>World Council of the Churches, 20</p> <p>World's Student Christian Federation, 131</p> |
|--|---|